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***The ‘Politics of Metropolitan Power’, Local  
Government and the ‘Politics of Support’ in  
Scotland – 1979-1997***

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*Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Politics*

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# ***Thesis Summary***

This thesis analyses the Conservative Party's electoral demise in Scotland from 1979 to 1997. This subject has already been extensively explored elsewhere. However, whilst acknowledging the validity and importance of what might be described as the canon of traditional reasons given for the Party's problems north of the border, this thesis identifies and explains the importance of a previously undervalued dynamic in the Scottish party political process.

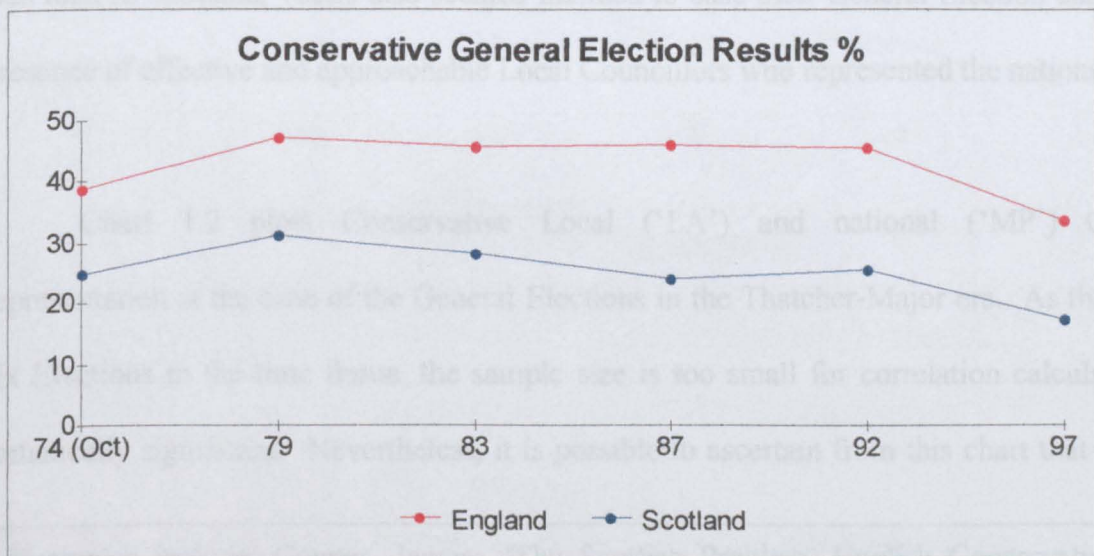
The central argument of this thesis is that the role of local party politics in Scotland has a significant impact on General Elections. The hypothesis under consideration is whether the Conservative Party found it particularly difficult to recover in General Elections subsequent to notable losses in levels of Local Government representation north of the border. Thus, the more qualitative aspects of this thesis establish why this might have been the case. This extra aspect of the party political system in Scotland is developed through a series of studies that analyse primary and secondary sources and the results of an elite and Local Councillor interview programme. These studies assess what Conservative Governments in London were hoping to achieve with their policies, how Local Government in Scotland reacted and what effect these dynamics had on the electorate north of the border.

After a case study on Stirling that examines how the matters in hand impacted upon a specific community, the Conclusion is then informed by a study of General and Local Government Election results from across the whole of the UK from 1979-1997. This thesis is not a comparative study of Local Government in Scotland and England. However, as the results in Chapter 7 demonstrate, the Conservatives did seem to find it much more difficult to recover from Local Government representation losses in subsequent General Elections north of the border. This suggests that the variable under consideration is a significant addition to the canon of reasons for their electoral demise in Scotland.

# Introduction

## Introduction

This project has its origins in an analysis of the contemporary relevance of core-periphery relations. One of the most obvious examples concerned with the governance of the United Kingdom has been the tension between the Conservative Party, when in power in Westminster, and the electorate Scotland. As Chart 1.1 shows, these tensions were manifested in poor General Election results for the Party north of the border during the era in question.



1.1 – Sources: Butler & Kavanagh: *“The British General Election of...”*<sup>1</sup>.

In recent years, the demise of the Conservative Party in Scotland has been thoroughly investigated<sup>2</sup>. The way in which the Scottish electorate has unfavourably received policies such

<sup>1</sup> Butler & Kavanagh: *“The British General Election of...”*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1979, p356; 1983, p301; 1987, p284; 1992, p286 & 1997, p256.

as the Poll Tax has also been extensively explored<sup>3</sup>. To find an original angle, therefore, the familiar set of reasons for the Conservatives' demise north of the border has had to be assimilated to see whether there were any misunderstood or undervalued aspects of the Anglo-Scottish relationship. An original testable hypothesis began to emerge, most notably from the findings of my elite interview programme. This can be stated briefly in the following manner.

The electoral benefits of Westminster seat incumbency have been studied and proved<sup>4</sup>. Thus, we can appreciate the importance of personality and accessibility amongst electorates with regard to their MP. As we shall see, what the Conservative elite in London failed to appreciate was that, in Scotland, voters also seemed inclined to base their General Election choices on the presence of effective and approachable Local Councillors who represented the national parties.

Chart 1.2 plots Conservative Local ('LA') and national ('MP') Government representation at the time of the General Elections in the Thatcher-Major era. As there are only six Elections in the time frame, the sample size is too small for correlation calculations to be statistically significant. Nevertheless, it is possible to ascertain from this chart that there might

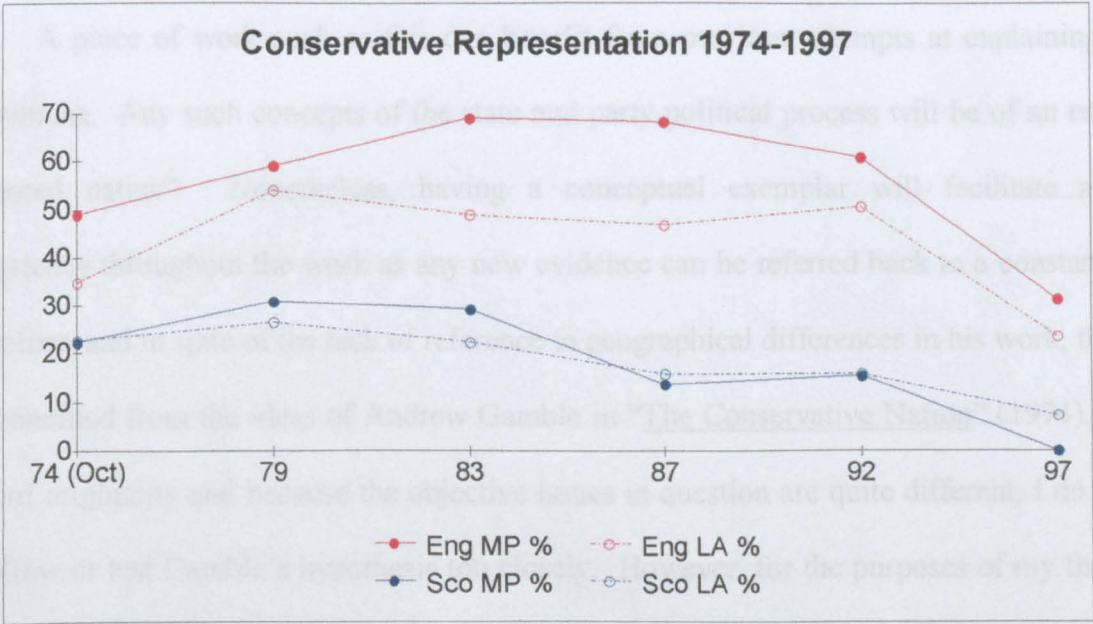
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<sup>2</sup> Examples include: Cooper, James: "The Scottish Problem: English Conservatives and the Union with Scotland in the Thatcher and Major Eras 1975-1992", PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, July 1998; Lynch, Philip: "The Politics of Nationhood. Sovereignty, Britishness and Conservative Politics", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999 and Seawright, David: "An Important Matter of Principle. The Decline of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party", Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Examples include: Evans, Eric J.: "Thatcher & Thatcherism", London, Routledge, 1997, p25; Mitchell, James: "Conservatives and the Union – A Study of Conservative Party Attitudes to Scotland", Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1990, p99; Riddell, Peter: "The Thatcher Era And Its Legacy", Oxford, Blackwell, 1991, p163 & Wilson, Edgar: "A Very British Miracle. The Failure of Thatcherism", London, Pluto Press, 1992, p181.



be an important connection between Local Government and national representation in Scotland. The data in this chart does not prove such a connection, but strongly suggests that it is worth investigating further.



1.2 – Sources: Butler & Kavanagh: *“The British General Election of...”*<sup>5</sup>  
and [www.politics.plymouth.ac.uk/politics/lgcecentre](http://www.politics.plymouth.ac.uk/politics/lgcecentre)

It seems that, being unaware of this possible link, the Conservative elite did not do enough to arrest the tide of Party Local Government election losses in Scotland that were being caused by central Government policies. Therefore, this thesis will be investigating the connection and inter-relationship between success in Local Government and General Elections in Scotland from 1979-1997, with the intention of adding these dynamics to the existing list of

<sup>4</sup> For example, Norris, Pippa: *“Electoral Change Since 1945”*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, pp185-186.



significant causes of the Conservatives' electoral decline north of the border. Before putting forward the full thesis agenda, however, the first task of this chapter is to outline some concepts essential to the work.

### ***Conceptual Underpinning***

A piece of work such as this can benefit from previous attempts at explaining similar phenomena. Any such concepts of the state and party political process will be of an essentially contested nature<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, having a conceptual exemplar will facilitate analytical consistency throughout the work as any new evidence can be referred back to a constant model. Therefore, and in spite of the lack of reference to geographical differences in his work, this thesis has benefited from the ideas of Andrew Gamble in "The Conservative Nation" (1974). For the sake of originality and because the objective issues in question are quite different, I do not wish to follow or test Gamble's hypothesis too closely. However, for the purposes of my thesis, it is very important to have a clear understanding of two key terms from: "The Conservative Nation." These are the 'Politics of Power' and the 'Politics of Support.' I want to explore them briefly here to lend credibility to my proposition that Conservative central Governments in the era in question might have fared better in elections in Scotland if they had been more aware of public and Local Government reception of their policies and the electoral effects thereof.

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<sup>5</sup> 1979, p356; 1983, p301; 1987, p284; 1992, p286 & 1997, p256.

<sup>6</sup> Further consideration of this term is given in the methodology chapter (9) at the end of this thesis. It should be noted at this point that all concepts should be tested both empirically and qualitatively against the 'facts' - however specified. Through the course of this thesis, it thus appears that Gamble's concepts emerge as very 'useful' on Gallie's criteria.

## ***‘The Politics of Power’***

The ‘Politics of Power’ is concerned with the way in which the central Government presides over the state, the Government being the authority that is the apex or overlap between the permanent institutions and culture that make up the state and the continually shifting party political contest. It is important to note that the state, according to Gamble, consists of more than just the machinery of the state system such as the civil service, judiciary, police, military and – importantly for this thesis – Local Government<sup>7</sup>. The social, economic and political arrangements of society are also included. As important parts of the state, these arrangements should constrain governments.

As we shall see in this thesis, the social and economic and political climate in Scotland was somewhat different to England during the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, according to Gamble’s model, the Conservatives should have acknowledged these different constraints on their power north of the border. Success in the ‘Politics of Support’ – to be examined below – is dependent on such flexibility and adherence to the constraints of the nature of the state. That the Conservatives chose a strictly unitary code suggests that such pragmatism was not always employed and will have to be considered in this thesis as a primary potential cause of their downfall in Scotland.

In order to highlight the difference between Gamble’s ‘Politics of Power’ and what was perceived to be the 1979-1997 Conservatives’ preferred form of ‘statecraft’, the term ‘Politics of

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<sup>7</sup> Gamble, Andrew: “The Conservative Nation”, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p3.

*Metropolitan Power*’ will be used from hereon<sup>8</sup>. This will denote that the Government was trying to run the state by only conforming to the constraints and demands put upon it by the prevailing circumstances of the affluent South East of England. Furthermore, this term highlights the differences and distance between the administration in London and the voters and local authorities on the geographical periphery.

### ***‘The Politics of Support’***

The ‘Politics of Support’<sup>9</sup> is the arena in which political parties compete for votes. A General Election victory gives authority to the Government to carry out its agenda in the sphere of the ‘POMP.’ To secure such wins, a firm understanding and successful execution of the ‘POS’ is essential. To have any sort of chance of controlling the state, a political party must use the democratic system to acquire and hold such power. This central tenet of all the major political parties is also at the root of the ‘POS.’ The nation, as opposed to the state, is the main arena for this section of Gamble’s hypothesis. The Conservative elite in London is most concerned with the ‘POMP’; that is to say, the ‘high politics’ of trying to run the state. Gamble writes: “The Conservatives have always prided themselves a party of government”<sup>10</sup>. However, the Leadership must also realise the need to reconcile this with the electorate of all persuasions and affiliations to be sure of winning the right to control the state. Once a political party has accepted the potential constraints that are placed on it as an incumbent or prospective Government by the realities of the ‘POMP’, it has to calculate how best to win support from the

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<sup>8</sup> Hereafter abbreviated to the acronym ‘POMP.’

<sup>9</sup> Hereafter abbreviated to the acronym ‘POS.’

<sup>10</sup> Gamble, 1974, p8.

electorate at large through its own MPs, representatives in Local Government and grass roots members. That is to say, how to have success in the 'POS.'

The support of the general electorate in the form of votes is obviously essential for the acquisition and maintenance of office. The idea as far as the Conservatives are concerned is to convince the voters that the Party is best equipped to run the British state. Such an acceptance by the electorate would herald the advent of the 'Conservative Nation'<sup>11</sup>. Gamble equates the 'POS' with a market place, with the metropolitan Government playing the active role of producers through the 'POMP'; with the voters as the consumers, who are usually passive, except at election time. There are certain rules that the Government must follow insofar as they have to supply policies that will satisfy enough of the voters to ensure re-election. I wish to impress that Governments, in the language of Gamble's model, must also react, instead of just dictating, to the needs and desires of their own Party members, Local Government representatives and voters in order to preserve the possibility of a General Election victory. This relationship between the core and periphery of the Party must be maintained not only through amicable and acceptable intra-party directives. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the Government must supply 'POMP' that the membership and representatives in Local Authorities agree with and find easy to work with and defend in their own areas.

This thesis investigates the connection between Local Government and General Election success. However, as the complex notion of the 'POS' suggests, this relationship should be viewed as more than just a simple 'coat-tail effect.' As we shall see, Local Councillors,

especially in Scotland, could not expect merely to stay in office because they represented the same party as the local MP or Government in Westminster. Quite often, the very opposite was the case for Conservative Councillors north of the border. Importantly for this work, it will become apparent that the Conservative metropolitan elite had to supply their Local Councillors with easily defensible policies during the era in question. If they did not, Local Councillors were likely to be voted out due to their association with an unpopular metropolitan administration. Thereby, as this work seeks to prove, the chances of victory for a Conservative General Election candidate in Scotland would be severely jeopardised as these important figures in their communities would no longer be in a position to organise and direct General Election support for the Party in their area. The development and importance of this role for Scottish Local Councillors is investigated further in Chapter 3, especially.

In essence, my original hypothesis couched in the terms of “The Conservative Nation” was that, from 1979-1997, the Conservatives interpreted the ‘Politics of Power’ as relating more or less exclusively to the governance of *England*. Ultimately, not only did this angle leave very little scope for original work as the subject has been covered so completely; it also proved to be very difficult to prove. Unsurprisingly, none of my Conservative elite interviewees were prepared to countenance such an accusation. Without first hand evidence, any postulations that I could have formulated would have been over-reliant on estimation and assertion. However, my initial investigations into the traditional aspects of the Anglo-Scottish scenario yielded a slightly more sophisticated hypothesis. I still wish to demonstrate that, because the ‘POMP’ was pursued without regard to the constraints imposed by the particular social and economic circumstances in

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p15.

Scotland, the 'POS' reacted back on the Government's ability to run the state, as they were out of office. However, their failure to manage the 'POS' competently went beyond merely alienating Scottish voters with unpopular policies.

What has not been examined to date is what might be termed to be one of the more subtle 'side effects' of the Conservatives' 'POMP.' Therefore, this thesis will assess whether the dynamics of Local Government in Scotland had a significantly discernible effect on the Conservatives' General Election demise north of the border. Specifically, we shall be contemplating the proposition that the loss of Conservative Local Government representatives (mainly due to unpopular metropolitan Government policies) significantly damaged the Party's 'POS' and consequent General Election chances in Scotland, and why this might have been the case?

The basic relationship between the 'POMP' and 'POS' can be expressed in quite straightforward terms. In essence, unpopular policies such as the withdrawal of industrial subsidies or the Poll Tax cost incumbent Governments votes. In 1980s and 1990s Scotland, such policies may have been insensitive to the specific needs of certain parts of the electorate, such as those in precarious employment situations. Support may also have been lost by policies that hurt the voters financially. Similarly, the disparity in affluence between Scotland and the South East of England and Scottish antipathy towards Mrs Thatcher personally did not help the Party's cause north of the border. However, the question remains of whether these problems, which perhaps could have been surmounted by an economic recovery or Mr Major's ascendancy, were

sufficient to completely destroy the Party's General Election chances in Scotland or, indeed, whether there are any previously unexplored reasons?

It should be noted that Mrs Thatcher felt that more than an economic upturn would be required to save the Conservatives north of the border<sup>12</sup>. As will be assessed later in the thesis, she felt that a dramatic change in Scottish thinking; away from 'dependency' and more towards enterprise, which would embrace Thatcherism as in England, was required<sup>13</sup>. We shall also discover that services and subsidies provided by Local Government in Scotland were key to preserving the voters' dependency. Therefore, if that culture were to be overturned, new relationships between Scottish voters and their Local Authorities and these Local Authorities and the Government in London would have to be engendered. If, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, Scottish Local Government has a particularly pervasive effect in society, such a sea change would be a point of great contention in the 'POS.' The issue of Local Authority housing provision demonstrates this dynamic well and is frequently used as an example of the metropolitan-peripheral relationship under investigation. Relations between the metropolitan Governments and Local Authorities during the era in question are key to this thesis. Therefore, in order to understand the interaction between the two levels of government better, a summary of core-periphery relations theories must be undertaken now.

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<sup>12</sup> Thatcher, Margaret: "The Downing Street Years", London, Harper Collins, 1993, p619.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

## ***Core-Periphery Relations Theories***

Rokkan and Unwin assert that the presence of 'difference', 'distance' and 'dependence' is necessary for a territory to be defined as truly peripheral<sup>14</sup>. All three requirements are satisfied by the Anglo-Scottish relationship. The differences in political culture are explored more fully in Chapter 3; and we shall also see the close correlation between central Government subsidy and high levels of employment north of the border (Chapter 4); that is to say, some degree of dependence on the metropolis. A key task now is to assess the relevant characteristics of the 'statecraft' employed by the Thatcher and Major administrations and how they impacted on Local Government in Scotland.

At the basis of the unitary state ideology that pervaded the Thatcher era is the notion that a strong, unified state is characterised by a stable, powerful centre<sup>15</sup>. This is not a new concept. The Jacobin tradition prescribes that the national will should always prevail over particular local interests and the "Federalist Papers" assert that a strong core government is necessary to protect individuals against pernicious local administrations<sup>16</sup>. Rokkan and Unwin note that the aim of a strong central state should be preserve the integrity of the whole territory whilst retaining legitimacy on the periphery. The eternal conundrum for metropolitan party leaders is how much accommodation of peripheral needs and desires can they allow in order to court popularity without compromising the established state system<sup>17</sup>? Such regional accommodation is usually

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<sup>14</sup> Rokkan, Stein & Unwin, Derek: "Economy, Territory, Identity. Politics of West European Peripheries", London, Sage, 1983, p3.

<sup>15</sup> Rousseau, Mark O. & Zariski, Raphael: "Regionalism & Regional Devolution in Comparative Perspective", New York, Praeger, 1987, p5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p10.

<sup>17</sup> Rokkan & Unwin, 1983, pp166-168.



managed through economic protection or subsidy. The way in which this method of courting support was not compatible with Conservative unitary strategies in the 1980s and 1990s and the consequent unpopularity of the resultant policies will be examined in Chapter 4. The Conservatives were relying on an economic recovery in Scotland to match the rest of the United Kingdom in order to revive their fortunes there<sup>18</sup>. As we shall see, such a revival was not forthcoming and the Party's 'POS' north of the border was severely damaged as a consequence.

Another key to the successful integration/'subjugation' of peripheral territories is the incorporation of the contemporary local elite<sup>19</sup>. As Bulpitt notes, the Conservative Party was aware of this tactic from an early stage and used it to considerable effect<sup>20</sup>. However, the Thatcher era saw a change in direction with regard to peripheral elite collaboration. She herself notes in her memoirs how senior Scottish Conservatives did not always seem to be 'one of us'<sup>21</sup>. Consequently, the Scottish Conservative elite was discounted along with other groups who had traditionally been allowed input into Government decision making<sup>22</sup>. Such groups included Trade Unions and deputations from industrial leaders and professional groups. Not only would this new attitude lead to policies that had not benefited from plural advice, and were thus more likely to be unpopular with significant sections of the electorate; but the newly excluded groups could advise many members to cast their votes and send their funds elsewhere.

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<sup>18</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p619.

<sup>19</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick, P. & Rose, R. (eds.): "The Territorial Dimension in United Kingdom Politics", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1982, p146; Rousseau & Zariski, 1987, p79 and Rokkan & Unwin, 1983, p15.

<sup>20</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick & Rose (eds.), 1982, p146.

<sup>21</sup> Thatcher, 1993, pp36 & 620-623 + Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

Rousseau and Zariski give the following overview of core-periphery studies, through which the dynamics of the London-Scotland relationship can be better understood<sup>23</sup>. Firstly, the classical elitist model, as represented by the works of Pareto, Mosca and Michels suggests that centralisation is inevitable. Notwithstanding the seemingly dialectic relationship between centralisation and devolution<sup>24</sup>, the elitists feel that substantial power will always gravitate towards the centre, where superior resources and personnel reside. C. Wright Mills notes that power accrues from actual offices and institutions, as well as the incumbent actors<sup>25</sup>. This structural aspect of core-periphery relations is especially noteworthy when considering a unitary state, as it is often in the gift of the metropolitan Government to decide how much power is vested in the institutions of the periphery at any particular moment.

Here lies one of the main debates within orthodox assessment of Local Government. Pickvance and Preteceille note the dichotomy between a structure-centred approach, which focuses more on the size and functions of units of Local Government; as opposed to the view that Local Government is a reflection of national politics, thus rendering actors and values at the local level more important<sup>26</sup>. With regard to Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s, the latter proposition can be more compelling, with some qualification. If 'national politics' is seen to be

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

<sup>23</sup> Rousseau and Zariski, 1987, pp44-84.

<sup>24</sup> This relationship may be explained by central Governments feeling the need to reduce their responsibilities and/or ensure the loyalty of the periphery by appearing sympathetic – Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Pickvance, Chris & Preteceille, Edmond (eds.): "State Restructuring & Local Power. A Comparative Perspective", London, Pinter, 1991, p6. This view is mirrored in the Glasgow Herald of 5.5.88, p12. Here, on the occasion of Local Government elections, the editorial is encouraging a high turnout in order to provide an accurate assessment of whether the Poll Tax and Thatcherism in general are viable north of the border.

UK-wide, then Local Government north of the border did not reflect the situation at all accurately, as the opposition parties were over-represented. Indeed, the Conservatives suffered greatly from not having significant representation on many Councils in Scotland as the implementation and ‘selling’ of ‘POMP’ at a local level was becoming increasingly difficult, as was campaigning for elections at any level<sup>27</sup>. However, if just the politics of the nation of Scotland is taken into account, it does seem that Local Government was reflecting the national situation accurately. On the other hand, we shall see that some of the functions of Scottish Local Government, such as the provision of housing, are so important in the fabric of the political culture north of the border as to render the structure-centred approach useful in some respects.

Classical pluralist views of core-periphery relations assert that power may be shared between the levels of government, but admits that power is still concentrated in a limited number of locations. Thus, if the party in power in the centre finds its lieutenants in office on the periphery, dictation of political direction should not be problematical. However, as this thesis seeks to emphasise, the Conservatives rarely enjoyed control of, or even substantial representation in, Local Authorities in Scotland. Therefore, even though Local Authorities north of the border were statutorily bound to implement the laws of the land, antagonism with the centre was likely<sup>28</sup>. Pluralists such as Tocqueville warn of the dangers of over-centralisation.

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<sup>27</sup> Interviews with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01. The non-collection of Poll Tax was perhaps the best example of Scottish local authorities seeking to disrupt the ‘POMP’ – Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 (see further in Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

However, they also have to admit that the alternatives of voluntarism and localism are no more attractive<sup>29</sup>.

The 'centre-periphery interaction' approach has identified a number of potential aspects of government and society to be studied. This school feels that the notions of identity and sense of (political) community impart more importance to peripheries than some others acknowledge. The legitimacy of an administration to govern and the reciprocal obligation to obey are important, as is the degree of penetration a central Government has; that is to say, how far has its effective control extended over a territory? Finally, within a core-periphery relationship, it is important to assess how well balanced the distribution of wealth and resources are between the various regions, as this dynamic often denotes whether a distant region will be content within a union.

Basic constitutional principles would suggest that larger more diverse states lend themselves to a federal system<sup>30</sup>. Consequently, there is an intermediary level of government between the citizens on the geographical periphery and the distant centre<sup>31</sup>. Given the thoughts of the Enlightenment and their embodiment in the constitutions of France and the United States, the question of whether Britain should be governed by a federal system came to light under the strains imposed by Irish and Scottish nationalism in the Nineteenth Century. The writings of Albert Venn Dicey provide excellent background to the debate. He was convinced that any form

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<sup>29</sup> Rousseau & Zariski, 1987, p67.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Grant in: Axford, B., Browning, G. K., Huggins, R., Rosamond, B. & Turner, J: "Politics. An Introduction", London, Routledge, 1997, p346.

of home rule or federalism would send the United Kingdom onto a ‘slippery slope’ towards breaking up due to competing local interests<sup>32</sup>. Furthermore, he was prepared to highlight the merits of the unitary system of government that had worked so well since 1707. The Act of Union created Great Britain. The unity engendered by this act had been strong enough to withstand pressure from Louis XIV. Similarly, if the Act had not been popular and effective, surely it would have been challenged by the sweeping wave of reform in the 1830s? Dicey’s support for the authority of the legal sovereign Parliament in Westminster would have been most compelling for a metropolitan English audience. Victorian Englishmen were very keen believers in an almost divine destiny for their nation and Empire. More scientific theories from Darwin and legal positivists made many believe that England could only survive in the expanding global ‘jungle’ if it was governed by a strong state. This strength would be due in no small part to powerful direct government provided by a single source of legislative sovereignty; that is to say, Westminster<sup>33</sup>. Similarities with the circumstances and prevailing attitudes of the late Twentieth Century are obvious. Thus, it is easy to appreciate how such sentiments as Dicey’s would have been popular in the modern era.

As the Act of Union had been entered into as a legally binding agreement, England had a moral obligation to uphold it. England also had a legal obligation to respect the Scottish ‘holy trinity’ institutions (Church, education and the legal system) preserved in the terms of the Act of

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<sup>31</sup> This buffer is held as very important in Scottish society – Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

<sup>32</sup> An argument repeated at length by modern Conservatives, as we shall see in the assessment of the 1992 General Election campaign in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>33</sup> Dicey, Albert Venn: “Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution 8<sup>th</sup> Ed.”, London, Macmillan & Co., 1920, p141.

Union<sup>34</sup>. Importantly, it was assumed that Scottish Local Government was to be preserved also. These institutions should have been sufficient to uphold an acceptable level of distinctiveness for those in Scotland with nationalist leanings. Therefore, the maintenance of the Union in unitary form was expedient and just as long as it did not contravene the democratic principles and sense of justice required to keep a state together. It seems that the modern Conservatives took the first part of this instruction literally but rather chose to ignore the latter requirements; insofar as they felt justified in upholding unitary principles, whilst seemingly having little regard for the lack of democratic credibility that they had north of the border. As we shall see in Chapter 3, a lack of credibility and mandate for the metropolitan Government in Scotland rendered Local Government more legitimate and influential in the eyes of many voters there.

A constitutionally guaranteed division of powers usually further dictates that local levels of government are responsible for what might be termed as more everyday aspects of citizens' lives, such as welfare provision. The fact that this thesis deals with the Anglo-Scottish situation before the institution of the devolved Parliament in Edinburgh should be remembered at this point. In the 1980s and 1990s, the most important issues of the day, according to contemporary opinion polls, were very often only in spheres that a central Government could deal with. Such issues included unemployment and the cost of living. However, if we look only slightly further down the list into the realms of 'low politics', we see that there was considerable concern about issues such as housing, education and health care provision. Therefore, we see further how

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<sup>34</sup> Harvie, Christopher: "Scotland & Nationalism – Scottish Society & Politics 1707-1994 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.", London, Routledge, 1994, p141.

Scottish voters may have had sufficient cause for high levels of contact with Local Government. This relationship and its consequences for the 'POS' are explored more fully in Chapter 3.

An important question facing the Conservatives in the 1980s and 1990s was whether the central Government should endeavour to ensure normative equality amongst all its regions through protectionism, subsidies and distributive welfare, as featured in earlier forms of Conservative 'statecraft'/territorial management? Alternatively, it could engage in more technocratic reformism, which ensures help and encouragement to productive areas, whilst leaving others to wither? As we shall see in Chapter 4 with regard to dropping levels of subsidies for industry in Scotland during the 1980s, the Conservative leadership decided on the latter, for apparently sound economic reasons<sup>35</sup>. In the terms of Sidney Tarrow, this was not so much a case of a 'diffusion-isolation' model, where the centre sought to dominate an isolated/backward area. It was more of an example of a 'dependency-marginality' model, where central statutory control was already assured and, indeed, strengthened by a return to unitary government. Furthermore, a form of 'internal colonialism' was perpetuated<sup>36</sup>.

The idea of a 'dual polity'<sup>37</sup> is most important in understanding the development of the relationship between central and Local Government in the 1980s and 1990s. In previous years, it seemed to suit both sides to remain relatively autonomous. Especially in Scotland, this understanding helped to preserve national pride. However, Local Authority spending levels were

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>36</sup> Rousseau & Zariski, 1987, p79. See also: Hechter, Michael: "Internal Colonialism – The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966", London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

beginning to rise significantly in the 1970s. Due to the economic atmosphere of the time, Westminster became more alert to the potential waste of taxpayers' money. Consequently, the issue of funding for Local Government became highly contentious and polarised the two major parties; who had been happy to enjoy the consensus until then<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, it was asserted that the issues of funding, efficiency and accountability could only be proficiently managed by actions of the metropolitan Government<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, notions of a 'dual polity' were subverted to a more dominant central administration. It was an irony that a neoliberal administration that was espousing the reduction of government interference in the lives of its citizens had to disturb the post-war equilibrium between central and Local Government heavily in the favour of Westminster to achieve this aim. This thesis will look to the dynamics of local party politics in Scotland to provide an extra dimension to the canon of reasons given for the Conservatives' electoral demise there. The next stage is to develop an original testable hypothesis that would, if proved, clearly demonstrate the validity and significance of this new variable.

### ***Hypothesis & Agenda***

This thesis is concerned with how local party politics in Scotland may have helped to precipitate the demise of the Conservative Party north of the border. Now that theoretical underpinnings are in place, the precise hypothesis for investigation must be presented. The hypothesis under consideration is whether:

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<sup>37</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick & Rose, 1982, p161.

<sup>38</sup> Pickvance in: Pickvance & Preteceille (eds.), 1991, p58. This dynamic is investigated further in the literature review at the end of Chapter 4.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



***Conservative losses in Local Government Elections in Scotland (losses primarily caused by the contemporary 'POMP') were severely damaging to the Party's subsequent General Election chances north of the border?***

If the qualitative and quantitative evidence herein can adequately support this hypothesis, it could be added to the list of significant causes of the Conservatives' electoral problems in Scotland. A detailed agenda follows in order to show the development of the hypothesis and evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, in its favour.

## ***Chapter Summary –***

### ***2. Ideology & Organisation in the Conservative Party***

Traditional views on Conservative Party ideology and organisation suggest that a strictly Unionist and, from the Thatcher years onwards, unitary, code was followed and that the Party leadership was highly centralised and consequently less caring about the needs and desires of voters on the geographical periphery. It is the aim of this chapter firstly to investigate this perception. If there is any truth in it, the potential for electoral problems in Scotland is evident.

This chapter includes assessment of the key principles of Conservatism and their effects on the 'POMP', including territorial management from 1979-1997. It goes on to assess Thatcherism as an ideology and the impact of the New Right in Scotland. The 1992 General Election campaign is then examined as a good example of 'key principles' being at the heart of the 'POMP.' Thereafter, the structure of the Party, the Party Leader and Central Office, the

Party Conference and the roles of the Secretary of State for Scotland and Scots in Westminster are all covered. All these sections seek to assess how and where 'POMP' decisions are made in the Conservative Party and whether from 1979-1997 the contemporary ideas, structures and agents were inherently incompatible with successful management of the 'POS' in Scotland?

### ***3. Scottish Local Governance & Its Effect on the 'POS'***

It is the purpose of Chapter 3 to highlight the pervasive nature of Local Government in society north of the border in order to introduce why it may be a new and significant addition to the list of reasons for the Conservatives' electoral demise in Scotland. Therefore, the chapter begins with an examination of the role of local party politics north of the border. This is followed by an assessment of the role of the state in Scottish society. These sections show how quite frequent contact is undertaken between Scottish voters and their Local Government representatives. This close relationship can be briefly attributed to more reliance on the state for employment benefits and housing, and an increased sense of legitimacy for government based in Scotland, as opposed to distant English 'absentee landlords'<sup>40</sup>. These reasons are explored much more fully in the chapter. The effects of the Scottish education system, media and religion on the political culture north of the border are also examined in order to assess further why the Conservatives might not have been faring so well.

Throughout this work, it is also important to remember that there was significant, if rarely Council-controlling, Conservative representation in Local Government in Scotland throughout the era in question. The next section highlights instances of how this branch of the Party helped

the national Party's General Election causes or, indeed, sought to criticise the central leadership. As we see in Chapters 2 and 3, it is essential to maintain an effective cadre of active local party workers in order to have success in the 'POS'. It was often the case in Scotland that such organisation often crumbled away in the face of indefensible metropolitan policies and, especially, after Local Government election losses. This last point is crucial to the hypothesis and centres around the idea that important organisation and direction for Conservative supporters comes from Party Councillors north of the border<sup>41</sup>, but only when they are able to stay in office. Once the importance of local party politics in Scotland has been established, subsequent chapters go on to present and assess situations and policies that made it harder for the Conservatives to maintain adequate and effective Local Government representation and support north of the border.

#### ***4. Conservative 'POMP' & the Party's Demise in Scotland 1979-1997***

There were several policies and attitudes ascribed to the successive Conservative administrations during the era in question that, whilst being somewhat popular with more affluent voters in England, served to lose the Party many votes in Scotland. Examples of such (in)famous programmes include the Conservatives' intransigence over devolution, the withdrawal of industrial subsidies and the Poll Tax<sup>42</sup>. To ascribe substantial, but not total, causality to these reasons for the Conservative demise in Scotland requires only basic perception of voters' motivations. Nonetheless, such analyses are very persuasive as an explanation of the matter in hand.

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<sup>40</sup> What Mrs Thatcher despised as the 'dependency culture' – Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Lord Fraser, 5.3.01.

The connection made by voters between their personal financial affluence and the competence of the incumbent Government to be rewarded at the polls is well documented<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, it is safe to extrapolate from this particular model, which has its critics<sup>44</sup>, that voters may also punish Governments if they feel that they themselves are not doing well financially. The Conservative elite is aware of this dynamic<sup>45</sup>. When interviewed, Mr Perry asserted that there are two main issues that affect voters' intentions. Firstly, and most importantly, personal fortune, as indicated by factors such as income, unemployment, the cost of living, inflation and interest rates. Secondly, it may be 'time for a change', as was witnessed in 1974 and 1997, when the economy was starting to recover<sup>46</sup>. Incumbent administrations may tackle the first set of issues through the 'POMP.' There seems to be little that they can do about the second dynamic.

Thus, a very simple function to partially explain the Conservative demise in Scotland may be constructed. Many Scots lost their jobs when the Government withdrew uneconomic subsidies for heavy industry north of the border; they blamed the Government in London for

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>43</sup> Examples include: Fiorina, M. P.: *Economic Retrospective Voting in American National Elections: A Micro-Analysis*, in: American Journal of Political Science, 22, 1978, pp426-443; Butler & Kavanagh, 1984, p14; Hugh Ward in: Marsh, David & Stoker, Gerry: "Theory and Method in Political Science", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1995, p92 + Sanders, David: *Government Popularity and the Next General Election*, in: Political Quarterly, Vol. 62, no. 2, 1991, pp235-261.

<sup>44</sup> For example: Schofield, N. J.: "Social Choice and Democracy", New York, Springer-Verlag, 1985, p291, where it is argued that the electorate takes a more general overview of the incumbent's economic competency for the whole nation.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

<sup>46</sup> This view was also expressed in the Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002. This survey comprised of face-to-face and telephone interviews and one written statement from the nine Stirling Councillors (5 Conservative & 4 Labour) who were in office through the 1980s and 1990s. The interviewees are listed in the Bibliography. The party affiliation of each particular respondent is noted in the relevant footnote.

these problems and, consequently, did not vote Conservative. Unemployment was the most potent cause of Conservative unpopularity in Scotland in the 1980s<sup>47</sup>. This problem was exacerbated when comparisons by voters were made with the affluent South East of England.

Furthermore, many Scottish voters lost out financially when they had to pay Poll Tax instead of domestic rates. Domestic rates were usually subsidised to such an extent that many Scottish voters had to pay nothing at all<sup>48</sup>. There are fairly justifiable long-term economic reasons for both of these particular policies, which are explored more fully in Chapter 4. Opposition parties, including in Scottish Local Government, were keen to perpetuate the view that the Conservatives were actually anti-Scottish<sup>49</sup>. The succession of unpopular policies seemed to support this opinion and the electorate showed their disapproval at the polls.

Chapter 4 gives an overview of the growing antipathy felt for the Conservatives in Scotland during the 1980s and 1990s. More importantly, however, it also goes on to further the argument that infamous policies such as the Poll Tax were not only directly unpopular with the general electorate, but were also damaging the Party in Local Government in Scotland. This damage to the Party's 'POS' was due to the policies causing considerable losses in Local Government Elections and their demoralising effect on Party workers and representatives north of the border. Furthermore, Labour representatives in Local Government in Scotland were, as we shall see, very often somewhat antagonised by the contemporary 'POMP' into increasing

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00.

their efforts to discredit the metropolitan Government amongst the electorate in their area<sup>50</sup>. This thesis seeks to highlight the magnitude of these problems. There is no intention to try to undermine the importance ascribed to policies such as the Poll Tax or industrial closures as causes of the Conservative downfall in Scotland. However, this thesis introduces new results of these policies in order to further the analysis of their effects.

Firstly, local Party activists were seen to stop working for the cause when they felt it to be lost in the 1980s due to a stream of unpopular measures emanating from London<sup>51</sup>. By the end of the 1980s, Conservative canvassers in Scotland were being met with 'pure hatred' on doorsteps due to their association with a distant unpopular regime in London<sup>52</sup>. The loss of these active members is disastrous for the 'POS', as they serve to undertake somewhat mundane, but, nonetheless, essential campaign duties at election time. Furthermore, an absence of an established and compliant Conservative network, including Local Government representatives in a contested geographical region, makes it even more difficult for the central administration to 'sell' bitter-tasting measures to the electorate and fend off damaging criticism from better organised pockets of local opposition<sup>53</sup>.

Chapter 4 ends with a review of other existing opinions on the Conservatives' electoral decline in Scotland. There are two main schools of thought as to the nature and chronology of this demise. The longer-term view argues that the Conservatives' regression in Scottish General

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<sup>50</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>51</sup> Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00, Viscount Younger, 14.2.01, Lord Lang, 27.3.01 & Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01 & Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

Elections has been somewhat constant and relentless since their zenith of 1955. The causes, according to proponents of this argument, are not so much in the policies of any particular Government in London, but more to do with the modernisation and secularisation of Scottish society. The consequent demise of Unionism, coupled with economic divergence with England, has thus left Scottish Conservatism bereft of any relevance. Those in favour of this long-term argument present the linear regression of Conservative results in Scotland (see Chart 4.5) as quantitative evidence. As Michael Dyer notes, there is no evidence that the General Election results of the 1980s and 1990s were any better or worse than expected for the Party north of the border<sup>54</sup>.

These opinions are contrary to the other main argument that it was indeed the ‘POMP’ of the Thatcher-Major era that was the prime cause of the Conservatives’ demise in Scotland. This part of the canon argues that the way in which issues such as Devolution and unemployment were handled by London, especially in the 1980s, gave rise to a feeling that that Conservatives were ‘anti-Scottish.’ Opposition parties used actual policies such as the Poll Tax as evidence to perpetuate this feeling. This short-term argument places more importance on the immediate effects of Thatcherism on the Scottish electorate, rather than contemplating longer-term structural reasons.

In this thesis, it is necessary to give credence to both arguments. As Chapter 4 investigates, the contemporary ‘POMP’ did have a definite impact on the Scottish electorate and

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

Local Government in the 1980s and 1990s. The main issues and policies in the short-term school of thought generated the topics and interview questions for Chapter 4. Nonetheless, it is also important to take into account the changes in Scottish society since the 1950s. Without the apparent demise in Unionism brought about by modernisation and secularisation, it is unlikely that Opposition parties would have had the credibility to be able to marshal the 'POS' so successfully through Local Government in the 1980s and 1990s. Chapter 5 goes on to investigate an aspect of the contemporary 'POMP' that had an especial impact on Local Government in Scotland.

### ***5. Centre-Peripheral Governmental Relations 1979-1997: 'Rolling Back the State'***

As earlier chapters seek to establish, Local Government north of the border seems to have an important General Election role, especially through the promotion or undermining of metropolitan policies and the use of its power and influence to rally support for all of the major parties. Of significant importance, therefore, is a set of policies instituted by the Thatcher administration in an attempt to rein in dissident Local Councils. These policies constituted the 'Rolling Back the State' programme.

As we shall see, the Government emphasised to the voters that power and funding was being taken away from Local Authorities in order to increase accountability and economic efficiency<sup>55</sup>. These goals were consistent with the New Right attitudes that pervaded the

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<sup>54</sup> Dyer, Michael: *The Evolution of the Centre-Right and the State of Scottish Conservatism*, in *Political Studies*, 2001, Vol. 49, pp30-50, p32.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01 + Thatcher, 1993, p32.



administration and its advisers. In England, voters were affluent enough to benefit from the resultant cuts in income tax, and were therefore more likely to reward the Government with their votes<sup>56</sup>. North of the border, however, reliance on the state was higher and affluence was lower. Therefore, most Scottish voters noticed the reductions in the services and subsidies that they had become used to, rather than the financial benefits of tax cuts<sup>57</sup>.

Chapter 5 will, with the housing issue as a primary example, assess how successive Conservative Governments liaised with, and, very importantly, controlled and dictated to, Local Authorities in Scotland. Whilst they may have been popular amongst the English electorate, I wish to demonstrate how these metropolitan dictates engendered friction in Labour Local Government north of the border<sup>58</sup>. This perceptible antagonism has particular relevance to the hypothesis under consideration. If Conservative Local Government representatives were being voted out of office, there would have been little opposition to Labour Councillors attaining local ideological hegemony and consequently steering their communities away from the Conservatives in General Elections.

Scottish Labour activists were not able to cause the downfall of the metropolitan administration, but were able to channel their efforts successfully into marshalling the voters in their area to substantially disrupt the Conservatives' 'POS.' Concurrently, unpopular measures in the 'POMP' were causing many Conservative Local Government representatives in Scotland to lose their seats. Therefore, there was little chance that the Conservative elite could effectively

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

defend the 'Rolling Back the State', or any other 'POMP', measures in Scotland. Before the hypothesis is tested empirically, a useful exercise will be to assess how the various policies and Local Government counter-measures affected a particular area of Scotland. Therefore, a case study of the Stirling area forms Chapter 6.

## ***6. Stirling Case Study***

This study examines how the 'POMP' and Local Government impacted on a particular area of Scotland in order to further suggest that the loss of Local Government representation would have created General Election difficulties for the Conservatives. From this study, it will be possible to ascertain how the various topics that have been discussed up to this point interacted to undermine the Conservatives' 'POS' north of the border.

The subject area of the case study was more affluent than more urban parts of Scotland. Therefore, it may have been inclined to lean more in favour of the Conservatives and their fiscal policies. Thus, in Stirling, both the Westminster seat and the Local Council were very closely contested throughout the era in question. Vitally with regard to the hypothesis under examination, the Conservatives did not lose the Parliamentary seat until they had lost significant numbers of Local Government representatives in the area, even though other more traditionally-accepted circumstances for the likely loss of a Conservative candidate were present in earlier years. Furthermore, the District Council, which was Labour-controlled for all but three of the years in question, often had cause to dispute directives emanating from the 'POMP.' Therefore,

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<sup>58</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

we are able to assess how such antagonism from the centre disrupted the Conservatives' 'POS' on the periphery through the efforts of disaffected Local Government in Scotland.

The first part of the chapter profiles the population of the area in order to understand why and how the major parties may have appealed to the electorate. Within the party political history of Stirling that follows, the issues of subsidy cuts, central control of Local Government and the Poll Tax are of key interest. They best demonstrate how Local Government representatives from both sides sought to promote the image of their own national parties amongst the voters by using local issues as a microcosm of the whole UK. Chapter 6 concludes about the defeat of the Conservative Parliamentary candidate in 1997, and whether this loss was significantly precipitated by the loss of 30% of Conservative representation in Local Government in the area in 1995. The Conservatives could have lost the Parliamentary seat in 1987 or 1992, as they did in many other parts of Scotland. Economic difficulties and opposition to metropolitan policies such as the Poll Tax were just as evident in Stirling as elsewhere in Scotland in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, unlike in other areas, Party Local Government representation remained high during these years in Stirling. This chapter seeks to assess whether the presence of effective Conservative Local Government representation up to 1995 was a significant cause of the Party MP in the area being immune to the General Election problems being suffered by his colleagues elsewhere in Scotland.

## ***7. General & Local Government Election Results 1979-1997***

All of the chapters to date have introduced and expanded the idea that the Conservatives might have suffered in General Elections in Scotland not only because of ideological failure and

unpopular central ideas and policies, but also due to an undercurrent of organisational failure at the local level in Scotland caused by the Party's 'POMP.' We have also seen why local affairs are very important in the 'POS' in Scotland due to the mandate issue and characteristics of the political culture. The dynamic of national fortunes reflecting local events is not unique to the Conservative Party. Much support for the Twentieth Century Liberals was generated from peripheral, rather than metropolitan roots<sup>59</sup>. Similarly, the SNP suffered poor results in the 1979 General Election subsequent to a series of Local Government 'blunders' in the preceding years<sup>60</sup>. However, I believe that this thesis is original in contemplating how the 'POMP' being exercised by a party in Government in Westminster could undermine its levels of Local Government representation and peripheral organisation; with this dynamic being a substantial cause of subsequent failures for the party in General Elections.

This thesis is not a comparative work. The dynamics of Local Government in England are not studied in depth. However, in Chapter 7, a comparison between the relevant Local Government and General Election results north and south of the border is made. In order to lend precision to the hypothesis, this has been undertaken in order to qualify whether Local Government representation losses were particularly damaging for the Conservatives in Scotland alone. To test the hypothesis as fully as possible, General Election results in Westminster constituencies affected by substantial Conservative Local Government losses in all regions of the United Kingdom are analysed. It is then possible to cross-tabulate and observe whether the hypothesis is substantially supported by the results. Such a comparative analysis qualifies the

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<sup>59</sup> Curtice & Steed in: Butler & Kavanagh, 1984, p347.

<sup>60</sup> Butler & Kavanagh, 1980, p11.

terms of the hypothesis. We are questioning whether Local Government election losses in Scotland were ‘severely damaging’ to the Conservatives’ General Election chances there? To be able to quantify the findings in terms of whether such losses were more or less damaging in Scotland than in similarly affected constituencies in England introduces a sense of precision into relative phrases such as ‘severely damaging.’

The results in Chapter 7 give the hypothesis substantial support and may also be used as a defence against accusations of false particularisation. A potential criticism is that the declines of local and national Conservative representation are associated symptoms of a more general decline of the Party in Scotland. However, the results in Chapter 7 clearly show that, indeed, the Conservatives would usually find it much more difficult to recover from mid-term protest votes north of the border. Furthermore, an assessment of all concurrent Scottish General Election results shows that such losses were not incurred where Conservative local representation remained more stable. Thus, whilst long and short-term reasons presented in other works are still valid, the hypothesis in this study should be added to the list of reasons for the Scottish Conservatives’ electoral decline.

## ***2. Ideology and Organisation in the Conservative Party***

### ***Introduction***

The aim of this chapter is to assess how the 'POMP' was formulated in London and how this process led to a further breakdown in the 'POS' north of the border. As Conservative General Election results in Scotland from the zenith of 1955 show, the Party's support has been in steady decline there (see Charts 1.1 and 4.5). Traditionally accepted reasons for this decline are examined more fully in Chapter 4 of this thesis. For the purposes of the current chapter, however, it is essential to bear in mind that the Party's support base in Scotland was less deep-rooted than in England<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the Conservatives could not afford to alienate too many of their meagre support-base north of the border, as such losses could not be sustained easily.

It would be impossible to develop a cohesive set of policies – the 'POMP' – without some concept of a framework of guiding ideas. Therefore, I wish to make a brief study of what ideas underpin Conservative Party strategies. Thereby, it will be possible to assess whether such an ideology is compatible with making policies that could have been popular in Scotland from 1979-1997, given the social and economic climate of the time. The second subject for investigation is the organisation and structure of the Party. We need to know who, whether individuals or (in)formally recognised offices and groups, had significant input into the policy-

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01 and Seawright, 1999.

making process? It will also be interesting to note here how heavily Scottish Conservatives were involved in this process. Once we know how policies were being made, and by whom, it will be easier to contemplate why the fortunes of the Party fluctuated so widely between England and Scotland.

Therefore, this first section on ideology begins with an assessment of the key principles of Conservatism and how they affect policy making in the British Conservative and Unionist Party. Whether or not Thatcherism was an ideology is addressed thereafter, as are the effect of the politics of the New Right on Scotland and the 1992 General Election campaign; the final issue being a good example of a 'key principle' being at the heart of the 'POMP' and its effect on the 'POS.' A key point to remember through the course of the chapter is whether the era in question emerges as a continuation of past practices, or a paradigmatic shift in Conservative thinking and organisation. If the latter is the case, it is possible that these changes may have been a significant cause of the Party's demise in Scotland. If not, issues more readily associated with the 'POMP' may have been to blame; but at least one major variable will have been eliminated.

### ***Key Principles of Conservatism***

Philip Norton is very keen to point out that, rather than having a strict ideology about how society should be, Conservatives are more inclined towards descriptive 'dispositions'

concerning how the world actually is<sup>2</sup>. This point was emphasised especially in the 1990s when the Party was trying to re-build under Mr Major and exorcise the dogmatic image of his predecessor<sup>3</sup>. We should also bear in mind that the British Conservative Party is renowned for subjugating ideological differences in favour of the Party unity required for their ultimate goal of winning office<sup>4</sup>. Gamble is not convinced that Conservative politicians are terribly concerned with questions of human nature and the organic development of society<sup>5</sup>. Instead, he contends that the Party has been more concerned with carrying on with Government and winning re-election. This has been the case since the advent of mass suffrage and helps Gamble to develop his theories of the 'Politics of Power' and 'POS.' He asserts that the advent of mass democracy has weakened Parliament's power over policy making as politicians in the modern era have to be more mindful of winning office. The similarities with Bulpitt's notion of 'statecraft' and its concentration on holding and winning power<sup>6</sup> are clear. One implication of a political party's over-concentration on issues at the political centre might have been a disregard for matters and members on the geographical and power periphery. As this thesis seeks to demonstrate, such aloofness by a central elite can have disastrous results in the 'POS.'

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<sup>2</sup> Norton, Philip (ed.): "The Conservative Party", London, Prentice Hall, 1996, p68. This and many of the subsequent points in Norton seem to rely heavily on Oakeshott.

<sup>3</sup> Lang, Ian: "Doing the Right Thing", London, Conservative Political Centre, 1994, pp6-7. Whether or not the Thatcher years were indeed a dogmatic shift away from the more pragmatic approach to the 'POMP' usually employed by the Conservatives is assessed more fully later in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews with Andrew Gamble, 16.3.00, Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 & Lord Fraser, 5.3.01.

<sup>5</sup> Gamble, 1974, pp1-2.

<sup>6</sup> Bulpitt, Jim: *Historical Politics: Macro, In-Time, Governing Regime Analysis*, in: Lovendowski, Joni & Stayner, Jeffrey (eds.): Contemporary Political Studies, 1995, (2), p518.



Inconsistencies and tensions inherent to conservative ideology, such as those between continuity and change, market forces and interventionism and the individual versus society, can be balanced by the potential for flexibility in a Conservative Party Government<sup>7</sup>. With regard to the Scottish question, such flexibility would have been necessary to rationalise the seemingly incompatible practices of subsidy, intervention and regional preferences with the unitary free market approach of the Thatcher era. Therefore, a major question for consideration is how does change come about in a Party naturally disposed towards conservatism?

Even in a conservative political party, there must be some facility for new ideas and policies. If society is a product of history, any changes must come slowly and ‘naturally.’ Such an ‘organic’ description of society (“Right is a function of time, rather than present rationality”<sup>8</sup>) can settle any disquiet concerning the possibility of radical change. Oakeshott acknowledges that Conservatives do not idolise the past or hope that change will never come. On the contrary, pragmatic Conservatives should be grateful for lessons that can be learned from history and events made possible by times gone by. However, it should be remembered that the spectre of radical change causes disquiet amongst Conservatives who fear potential losses more than they eagerly anticipate potential gains<sup>9</sup>. The notion of the organic nature of society can also help to give citizens more of a sense of belonging to such a community free from artificially imposed

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<sup>7</sup> Norton (ed.), 1996, pp80-82. Such flexibility is not a characteristic often associated with the Thatcher administrations of the 1980s – Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01.

<sup>8</sup> Norton (ed.), 1996, p71. As we shall see, many policies, in the Thatcher era especially, were justified as being ‘right’ (usually on economic grounds – therefore giving more credence to the ‘present rationality’ argument), even though they were unpopular with large sections of the electorate.

regulations. Oakeshott contends that the main issue that has to be preserved in society is identity<sup>10</sup>. The ramifications of this assertion for territorial management are obvious.

Luminaries of the conservative tradition such as Burke have asserted that changing to keep up with contemporary circumstances was necessary if the essential fabric of society was to be preserved<sup>11</sup>. For Burke, the most important issues were the conservation of community, the 'organic' development of society, tradition, authority and a hierarchical system<sup>12</sup>. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the notion of community is very important in Scotland. Therefore, the Conservative elite would have been well advised to ensure that this particular principle was adhered to well north of the border in order to avoid the 'POS' problems brought about by crumbling organisation and Local Government representation.

Many liberal theories consider what could be possible in a state, given their acceptance of the potential perfectibility of man, whereas Norton asserts that long periods in office have taught the Conservatives to be more pragmatic and care only for what is currently possible<sup>13</sup>. Lord Lang noted that this attitude within the Party elite was never going to be popular in Scotland. Whereas the Thatcher administration was keen to emphasise to voters what they could reasonably expect from a Government in return for their tax payments, the Scots still somehow

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<sup>9</sup> Oakeshott, Michael: "Rationalism in politics & other essays", Indianapolis, LibertyPress, 1991, p408.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p410.

<sup>11</sup> Norton (ed.), 1996, p72. This conforms to Gamble's concept of the 'Politics of Power', in which Governments are constrained in part by the social and economic changes apparent in society – Gamble, 1974, p3.

<sup>12</sup> Lynch, 1999, p4.

felt that they were due more. The Prime Minister despised this ‘dependency culture.’ She was not prepared to dilute her message and, thus, a seemingly intractable divide between her and the Scottish electorate began to appear<sup>14</sup>. This thesis assesses whether the Conservative elite’s failure to act upon the unique structural characteristics of Scottish local communities and political culture was a significant factor in the Party’s demise north of the border.

### ***‘Key Principles’ of Conservatism in the ‘POMP’***

The issue that precipitated confrontation was the withdrawal of Government subsidies for ailing heavy industry in Scotland. These measures, which are examined more closely in Chapter 4, were presented as pragmatic economic responses to the contemporary industrial climate. For the purposes of this chapter, it is interesting to note that the Government was also prepared to justify the measures on ‘philosophical’, that is to say, neoliberal, grounds. It seems that this diversion from less dogmatic ways may have been ill conceived with regard to the governance of Scotland. In Chapter 3, we shall see in a study of the role of Local Authority housing provision that the New Right philosophy of ‘Rolling Back the State’ and increasing individuals’ sense of self-preservation was popular in England. South of the border, the economy was buoyant enough to sustain voters through the initial symptoms of state intervention withdrawal. This was not the case in Scotland<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, to justify the changes because they were ‘right’<sup>16</sup> would have required a much greater level of ideological hegemony for contemporary Conservative Party New Right thinking in Scotland than was actually the case if the electorate there was going

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<sup>13</sup> Norton (ed.), 1996, p72.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with David McLetchie, 19.1.01.

to accept the policies. Furthermore, these attitudes and policies that were becoming so unpopular with the Scots were also difficult to defend in Local Authority forums north of the border. Therefore, Conservative Local Government representatives in Scotland were losing office or local ideological hegemony and credibility to Opposition parties through little fault of their own<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, the Party was losing essential cohesion and enthusiasm in the face of well-organised local opposition in Scotland. As we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, such opposition was mainly managed by the established political parties in Local Government and Trade Unions<sup>18</sup>.

Pragmatism comes very much to the fore in the history of Conservative policy making. However, it would not seem possible for a party to be run completely without principles. Gamble feels that the Party leaders are always heavily pragmatic due to their natural instinct for power<sup>19</sup>. This instinct has served the leaders and the Party well, as witnessed by their many years in office in the Twentieth Century. However, there are some issues upon which a stance is taken as a fundamental issue of principle. There are three obvious examples of how sticking to such principles did not produce a positive result at the polls. We have already introduced the problems caused especially in Scotland in the 1980s by neoliberal economics. Secondly, Gamble noted that the Conservatives would have been better advised not to identify the European question as the defining issue of British politics in the mid-1990s. He asserted that the British public was not really that interested. Ironically, given Scotland's traditional pre-

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01.

<sup>17</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

disposition towards looking outwards from the British Isles<sup>20</sup>, this was one issue of principle that the Major administration may have been able to make some political capital from north of the border. The final problematical Conservative principle in Scotland was their intransigence over Devolution. That issue is dealt with more fully below and in Chapter 4.

Law, order and authority are vital principles to Conservative notions of how the state should be run; and are, thus, key elements of the 'POMP.' However, Conservatives have always been suspicious of governmental power imposing on the individual rights of citizens. State involvement is essential to defend the realm and domestic peace, but central administrations should always be answerable to Parliament. Oakeshott asserts that changes in the rules that govern society should reflect contemporary events, rather than being artificially imposed<sup>21</sup>. It could be argued that the alleged use of Scotland as a 'guinea pig' for the Poll Tax and other Local Government financial control experiments were examples of such erroneous imposition<sup>22</sup>. However, it should also be noted here that the Poll Tax originated from requests by Scottish Conservatives to reform the Domestic Rating system; this suggests that the policy was indeed reflecting the wishes of at least part of British/Scottish society<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview, 16.3.00 + Interviews with Lords Sanderson, 30.11.00 & Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>20</sup> As demonstrated by their alliances with the French and heavy involvement in Empire, military, engineering and religious missions – interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>21</sup> Oakeshott, 1991, p428.

<sup>22</sup> These matters are studied in greater detail in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, which deal more specifically with the Conservatives' 'POMP' and its effects on Local Government.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

The Conservatives' actual problems with nationalism are discussed in greater depth in subsequent chapters of this thesis, with especial reference being given to the question of who has a legitimate mandate to govern Scotland? Here, it is important to note that their guiding principle on the issue (that of reconciling liberty with order) would have put them at odds with many sections of Scottish society, including Conservative members there. Thus, the chances of Conservatives north of the border being able to stay in Local Government office or in the esteem of their neighbours and peers were rendered quite slim.

Of most interest to this chapter is the way in which Conservative 'POMP', that was derived from the dominant principles in the Party during the era in question, may have served to undermine Party organisation and Local Government representation in Scotland. The way in which 'key principles' affected the Governments' attitudes towards territorial management in the UK is considered now to assess whether it may have been a cause of failing 'POS.'

### ***'Key Principles' and Territorial Management***

The main question to be dealt with in this section is how Conservative ideology influenced territorial management practice? Hereby, we may gain insight into why their 'POS' began to fail in Scotland. Given the Conservative tradition's emphasis on sceptical reductionism, one would expect that local conditions would very much influence 'POMP' measures, with regional sensitivity very much in evidence. Once the Irish Home Rule question had pushed territorial matters into the realms of 'high politics' in the aftermath of the First World War, members of the Conservative elite had to give more consideration to matters they

had previously felt happy to leave to local agents. The old dual polity system had protected central autonomy to pursue what the elite felt to be genuinely ‘higher’ matters<sup>24</sup>. As conservative Unionists, the Party was looking to preserve the constitutional settlement, the Empire, the sovereignty of Parliament and the contemporary distribution of power and property in society. Peripheral pressure for Devolution had been dealt with by allowing concessions such as the creation of the Scottish Office in 1886. This was still within the bounds set out in Unionist texts such as A. V. Dicey’s “England’s Case Against Home Rule”, which contended that the Union was the only framework within which justice, freedom and state authority could be maintained<sup>25</sup>.

More modern examples of the centre’s desire for autonomy are the ways that they wished to see race politics issues and housing provision settled at a sub-national level<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, and vitally for this thesis, the way in which the central Party did not seriously engage in local politics to any serious degree<sup>27</sup> demonstrates a desire to remain somewhat autonomous. This thesis contemplates the proposition that this Party elite tendency to remain aloof from local politics was just as much of a cause of general electoral problems for the Conservatives in Scotland as some of the less well received ‘POMP.’ This was due to the apparent fact that Opposition parties were more effective on a local level and the Conservatives had lost their main

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<sup>24</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick and Rose (eds.), 1982, p163.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Lynch, 1999, p17.

<sup>26</sup> Bulpitt in: Layton-Henry & Rich (eds.), 1986, p41 & Thatcher, 1995, p396.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01 & Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002 – notwithstanding occasional strong intervention by the Thatcher and Major administrations when they felt that Opposition controlled Local Government needed to have power or funding removed – see Chapter 5 especially.

sources of organisation and direction in the form of Local Government representatives who had lost office.

One 'basic disposition'/'key principle' that has been important to many Conservative Governments, including those of Mr Major, is the concept that Britain should be 'One Nation.' The idea of domestic 'one nation' Toryism has two meanings. The first is a desire for social harmony amongst the various interest groups and classes. This idea in the 1980s and 1990s came to mean equality of opportunity and freedom within the law and from over-regulation by governments at local and national level<sup>28</sup>. Secondly, and very importantly for this thesis, the idea of 'one nationalism' is especially concerned with a commitment to the preservation of the Union; although it should be remembered that this does not necessarily mean that peripheral identities have to be subjugated in favour of a homogenised British version. An electorally profitable application of the 'one nation' principle has been for Conservatives to appeal to the imperialism/patriotism of most Britons, including Scots, at election time. Mr Major was to use this tactic to some effect in the General Election of 1992 especially. His predecessor also benefited greatly from an upsurge in patriotism following the Falklands War just before the 1983 General Election.

David Seawright provides a concise summation of Unionist principles and policies<sup>29</sup>. He identifies Unionism as a substantial ideology in itself, thus making it serve as credible theoretical

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<sup>28</sup> Waldegrave, William: "Tory Democracy and One Nation: Their Relevance Today", London, Conservative Political Centre, 1996, p12.

<sup>29</sup> Seawright, 1999, p158.



underpinning for the modern Conservative Party; a party not renowned for dogmatism. Seawright asserts that the Party's roots lie in moderate socio-economic policies, interventionism and a desire to preserve the Union. Aughey also confirms a link between *English* Conservatism and Unionism<sup>30</sup>. The Party has always suffered in Scotland from an overtly English image. For this thesis, it is important to note that this image was exacerbated in the Thatcher era<sup>31</sup>. However, many other policies in the 1980s also seemed to react more to contemporary circumstances in the manner of traditional Conservative pragmatists, rather than being based on dogmatic principles. Therefore, the next question to be assessed is whether Thatcherism was a radical new form of Conservatism; and what effect did it have on the governance of Scotland?

### ***Thatcherism as an Ideology (?)***

Traditional Conservatism can be characterised by a distrust of new ideas not tested by experience and a wish to conserve (the essentialist view of the existent); only gradual 'organic' change is acceptable<sup>32</sup>. However, it does not account for more radical policy shifts as displayed by the Heath and Thatcher administrations. Indeed, Mr Major was keen to distance the Party from any perceived radicalism and, instead, project an image of 'refreshingly constant' beliefs; even though policies would have to be adapted to suit contemporary times<sup>33</sup>. Thus, there may be an argument that the 1980s were indeed a significant departure from traditional Conservative ways, thereby possibly being the cause for the Party's demise in Scotland. Therefore, this is an

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<sup>30</sup> In Norton (ed.), 1996, p233.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01 & Thatcher, 1993, p624.

<sup>32</sup> Norton (ed.), 1996, p68.

<sup>33</sup> Major, John: "Conservatism in Action: Strengthening the Rule of Law", London, Conservative Political Centre, 1996, p4.

appropriate point to assess the impact of the politics of the New Right that seemed to underpin the 'POMP' employed in that decade.

Advocates of the New Right "(S)tress the efficacy of the free market for economic and political freedom"<sup>34</sup>. Mrs Thatcher was very much an adherent of this neoliberal creed. She believed that the British economy had stagnated and the citizens had become too used to a 'nanny state' in the post-war era and especially in the 1970s under Labour<sup>35</sup>. The Prime Minister hoped that the New Right approach would re-vitalise the United Kingdom and was thus committed to the principles put forward by economists and theorists such as Hayek, Adam Smith and her contemporary, Sir Keith Joseph<sup>36</sup>. These ideas conformed to the post-industrial consensus among Western European and North American Governments of the centre-right at this time<sup>37</sup>.

The tax cuts inherent to a programme of deregulation and sub-contracting of state and municipal functions was popular with affluent voters in the South East of England in the early 1980s<sup>38</sup>. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, however, this programme of 'Rolling Back the State' did not seem to be so popular in Scotland. This came as a surprise to the Prime Minister, who thought that the Scots should be especially receptive to such ideas, given the apparent

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<sup>34</sup> Ian Fraser in: McLean, Iain (ed.): "Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics", Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p341.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>37</sup> Studlar in: Waltman, J. & Studlar, D. T. (eds.): "Political Economy – Public Policies in the United States and Britain", London, University Press of Mississippi, 1987, p7.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Lords Sanderson, 30.11.00 & MacKay of Clashfern, 22.1.01.

traditions of self-help and thriftiness that she perceived to be in place north of the border<sup>39</sup>. When assessing why Thatcherism failed in Scotland throughout this thesis, it will be important to remember two major factors. Firstly, the economy in Scotland did not expand like its English counterpart in the 1980s. Consequently, fewer of the voters there were in a position to benefit from tax cuts. Secondly, greater dependence on the state for jobs, welfare and housing north of the border dictated that any reduction in services or benefits was unlikely to be popular there. This aspect of Scottish culture is explored more in Chapter 3 and strongly suggests that Local Government in Scotland was likely to have an important role in the 'POS.' David Seawright identifies the alienation caused in Scotland by the 'New Right' ideology being employed in the 1980s as one of the most important factors in the demise of the Conservatives in Scotland<sup>40</sup>.

The Prime Minister described the thinking behind her policies thus:

"In Education, Housing and Health the common themes of my policies were the extension of choice, the dispersal of power and the encouragement of responsibility. This was the application of a philosophy not just an administrative programme"<sup>41</sup>.

It is especially interesting to note that the policy issues raised in this quote were being administered, to varying degrees, by instruments of Local Government. Therefore, potential conflict with Opposition parties and lack of manageable policies to be defended by Conservatives in Scotland are imminent. It is very important to provide Conservatives in Local

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<sup>39</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p622.

<sup>40</sup> Seawright, 1999, p199.

<sup>41</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p618.

Government with policies that they feel happy to defend<sup>42</sup>. In many instances, local Conservative politicians have even been prepared to ally with their opponents on a local level, rather than pursue a central policy that they feel will be disadvantageous to residents in their region<sup>43</sup>. Issues specific to these parts of the 'POMP' are investigated in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Mrs Thatcher defended her 'philosophy' with almost religious zeal. This was demonstrated in a reply to Church leaders who had condemned the Government for being too materialistic<sup>44</sup>. When the Bishop of Durham had called Thatcherism 'almost wicked', the Prime Minister replied that even the Christian faith condoned personal responsibility in addition to spiritual redemption. She believed that it was the duty of individuals to create wealth and dispose of it responsibly for the good of the nation<sup>45</sup>. The state should do its best to relieve hardship and provide education and social services. However, Mrs Thatcher was convinced that the prescribed role of government should not extend to undermining individual responsibility through excessive intervention<sup>46</sup>. That the very term 'Thatcherism' was coined to describe the 'POMP' employed by the Conservatives in the 1980s suggests that it was indeed a departure

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01. An example is the way in which Neville Bosworth would occasionally side with his Labour opponents in order to preserve his promise of putting 'Birmingham First.'

<sup>44</sup> Mrs Thatcher's alienation of the agents of the 'holy trinity' (clergy, lawyers and teachers) of Scottish society – in addition to doctors there – led to a breakdown of these socially powerful professional groups, with malevolent effects on the Party's 'POS' north of the border – Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

<sup>45</sup> This attitude was never going to be popular in Scotland where, as the Conservatives in London acknowledged, a 'dependency culture' existed – Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

from previous forms of 'statecraft.' If an ideology is defined as a consistent set of ideas by which a group understands the world and pursues to achieve their aims, then Thatcherism seems to satisfy these conditions. What we must question, therefore, is how far did it actually deviate from traditional Conservatism, and did these changes precipitate the Party's demise in Scotland?

Stephen Lee lists six basic priorities of Thatcherism: to reduce the role of the state and promote individualism; to develop the market economy to arrest any economic decline; to promote popular capitalism through privatisation programmes; to destroy inflation by controlling the supply of money; end industrial conflict by eliminating the power of the Trade Unions and enhance Britain's international standing<sup>47</sup>. The battle against inflation was the most important of these objectives to the 'New Right' in 1979<sup>48</sup>. Displaying tremendous confidence in the ability of market forces to cure the woes of the country by promoting competitive efficiency and accountability, Mrs Thatcher put forward this 'philosophy' from her earliest days as Leader of the Opposition. However, these principles appeared in their purest form during the 1987 General Election campaign. With a large majority behind her, the Prime Minister sought to 'Roll Back the State' as much as possible; a policy with its origins in the neoliberal creed. This programme was very much to include Local Government – with important consequences for my hypothesis. Important measures included the introduction of the Poll Tax and furthering the

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<sup>46</sup> Thatcher, Margaret (compiled by: Cooke, Alistair B.): "The Revival of Britain. Speeches on Home & European Affairs 1975-1988", London, Arum Press, 1989, p249.

<sup>47</sup> Lee, Stephen J.: "Aspects of British Political History 1914-1995", Routledge, London, 1996, p231.

<sup>48</sup> Evans, 1997, p11.

privatisation programme<sup>49</sup>. Clive Grey notes that Mrs Thatcher's modifications in Local Government changed the post war consensus that had been accepted in Scotland and the rest of the Union<sup>50</sup>. Opposition parties in Scottish Local Government did not welcome such a change<sup>51</sup>. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this dynamic was to have a serious effect on the Conservatives 'POS' north of the border.

There is little doubt that the Prime Minister could not be swayed easily from her devotion to this brand of policies. Indeed, given her personality, and the inherent dangers to their career prospects of doing so, few Cabinet members were prepared to try. An interviewee who wishes to remain anonymous on this point related the best demonstration of this scenario to me. He recalled how new members of the Cabinet were often quietly advised by their more seasoned colleagues never to interrupt the Prime Minister when she was "on a roll." This says more about Mrs Thatcher's personality than about whether Thatcherism was an ideology. We will examine the effect of this personality on the 'POMP' and 'POS' in Scotland in Chapter 4. For the time being, it is nonetheless essential to note that this Prime Minister, perhaps more than any of her Conservative predecessors, was determined to rigorously adhere to her principles. This was not a problem when the English economy was buoyant. However, when more flexibility was required, such as with the Scottish situation, the Prime Minister was seen to fail<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Guardian, 22.5.87.

<sup>50</sup> Grey, Clive: "Government Beyond the Centre – Sub-National Politics in Britain", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1994, p55.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01. The 'Rolling Back the State' programme's effects on Local Government and the 'POS' in Scotland are examined closely in Chapter 5.

However, before Mrs Thatcher is judged as being solely committed to the dogmatic adherence to a narrow ideology, another dimension must be considered. Rather than being a pro-active theory of government, some writers such as David Marsh and Andrew Gamble conclude that Thatcherism was devised as a pragmatic response to the circumstances that the Conservatives faced at the end of the 1970s<sup>53</sup>. Instead of New Right ideology being the only guide to the Government's actions, it could be considered to have been merely a tool to deal with economic stagnation. To follow the ways of authoritarian populism can even be seen to be a pragmatic move, as voters in Britain and around the western world seemed to be moving in this direction<sup>54</sup>. Marsh also suggests that using Britain's industrial malaise as being the only reason for the advent of Thatcherism is too simplistic. He prefers to cite the social and economic problems of the 1970s as just the context in which the Conservatives had to take electoral and policy decisions. Therefore, the Thatcher Governments should not be judged as having been a complete reversal of all traditional Conservative ways.

A difference with earlier times was detected due to the novelty of the policies and accompanying attitudes. Accusations that Thatcherism was a dangerously radical creed came most often from voters and Party members who did not benefit from the actual policies<sup>55</sup>. James Mitchell holds the opinion that the Conservative Party was doing very well in England by

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<sup>52</sup> A series of unattributable interview comments – Winter 2000-2001.

<sup>53</sup> Marsh, David: *Explaining 'Thatcherite' Policies: Beyond Uni-dimensional Explanation*, in: *Political Studies*, 1995 XLIII, pp595-613, pp595-597 + Gamble in: Mohan, John (ed.): *"The Political Geography of Contemporary Britain"*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1989, pp1-3.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

picking up new working class voters with its tax cuts. However, he feels that the Party became too reliant on this section of society. Mitchell believes that the Conservatives felt that Scotland was no longer worth fighting for as a healthy Parliamentary majority could be obtained just by securing England<sup>56</sup>. If such an attitude filtered through to formerly loyal supporters north of the border, they would have become very disenchanted<sup>57</sup>.

A senior Conservative asserted to me at interview that the ideals of Thatcherism rang true in Scotland and that she had many admirers there<sup>58</sup>. However, this admiration could not be translated into effective local campaigning and support. The interviewee admitted that a major cause of this failure in the 'POS' was the *perception* amongst Scottish Conservatives that the Party in London ultimately did not care about the fate of its northern branches. This is an example of Scottish Conservatives being put into an untenable situation by London. Even if the Scots' perception was unjustified, the very presence of these feelings would have had a malevolent effect on the 'POS.' Therefore, the issue should have been addressed by the Conservative elite in London through their intra-Party and 'POMP' dealings with their Local Government representatives and Associations in Scotland.

Most importantly, however, it should be noted that the Thatcher years were unpopular in Scotland because of the policies that were imposed and the contemporary economic conditions

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<sup>55</sup> The Poll Tax was an example of a zero-sum situation where those who lost out financially were far more vocal with their protests than any praise that came from voters who benefited – Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>56</sup> This opinion was refuted by all of my elite interviewees from within the Conservative Party.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with James Mitchell, 8.6.00.



north of the border. Importantly, any particular changes in ideology, for example from Unionist to unitary, were not noticed particularly by the electorate or Party members, who were more concerned with their immediate employment prospects and financial situations<sup>59</sup>. When she became Conservative Leader, Mrs Thatcher was received with relief and confidence by a party, including its Scottish members, who wanted to distance themselves from the Heath era<sup>60</sup>. She undertook to tackle the Trade Unions and this pro-active style was welcomed in the same way as Ian McLeod's promises of tax cuts in the 1960s. Nevertheless, especially up to the 1987 General Election, there is little justification for identifying radical ideological shifts in the Conservative Party. The 'POMP' may have been pursued with new vigour and direction, but this is insufficient evidence for arguing that the *ideology* of the Thatcher years caused a breakdown in the 'POS' in Scotland.

Once Mrs Thatcher was out of office, one of the biggest challenges facing her successor was to decide which policies and attitudes should be perpetuated, and which ones jettisoned? We see how Mr Major dealt with successful and troublesome policies such as the sale of Council Houses and the Poll Tax elsewhere in this thesis. In this chapter, we are most concerned with what levels of dogma the new Prime Minister approached his position? As the example of the 1992 General Election campaign shows, there were some issues, with direct impact on the voters of Scotland, that Mr Major was prepared to take a stand on.

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<sup>58</sup> Anonymous Interview, 21.6.00.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid and Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00. Statistical support for this assertion is presented in Appendix A to this chapter.

## ***The 1992 General Election Campaign***

Norman Blackwell, the head of Mr Major's policy unit, had five key themes that the Party's 'statecraft' should be based on. They were: a sound economy, opportunity and choice, law and order, first class public services and national pride<sup>61</sup>. Blackwell had realised that the Party elite seemed out of touch with the needs and desires of its supporters around the country, including Scotland, and consequently initiated 'Operation Disraeli.' This was a consultation exercise to try to construct an accurate picture of what the Government should be trying to deliver in terms of 'POMP' in order to maximise support at the next General Election. The themes listed above were based on his findings. However, it remained to be seen how the Government could operationalise the concepts whilst remaining within the guiding principles of Conservatism and, more importantly, within the parameters of cost and ease of implementation.

One of the issues of principle that was to have the most significant effect on Scotland was the Unionist stand against Devolution taken by the Major campaign during the 1992 General Election. In his autobiography, the former Prime Minister outlines his reasons for a heavily pro-Unionist stance<sup>62</sup>. He describes how he felt that Devolution would lead to a 'slippery slope' ending in the break up of the United Kingdom<sup>63</sup>. Thus, Britain would have lost credibility and standing on the international stage. Furthermore, Scotland would lose the political influence it

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

<sup>61</sup> Seldon, Anthony: "Major – A Political Life", London, Phoenix, 1998, p543.

<sup>62</sup> Major, John: "The Autobiography", London, Harper Collins, 1999, pp415-418.

<sup>63</sup> Mr Major was not the first Conservative to express this fear. Lord Sanderson confirmed that William Whitelaw saw this dangers of Devolution many years before, thus confirming how a long-standing assessment of a literal situation can be adopted as a key principle of conservatism – Interview 30.11.00.

enjoys through the Scottish Office in London and much of the inward investment that had generated the start of an economic recovery.

The Prime Minister was aware that the official Party line on Devolution was not necessarily going to be popular in the contemporary Scottish climate<sup>64</sup>. However, the decision was taken to pursue this tactic because it was 'right', even if the electoral consequences would be to see the last thousand Unionists in Scotland 'go down in flames' together<sup>65</sup>. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the Conservatives frequently justified policies that were uniquely unpopular in Scotland as being 'right.' The example of the replacement of the Poll Tax, one such 'right' policy, when it became unpopular in England suggests that the Party's sense of right was not entirely independent from serious problems at the polls that their policies were causing. Herein lies a most important question. Can a key guiding principle really overpower the desire for electoral success in the Conservative Party?

The genuineness of Mr Major's hostility towards Devolution is questionable because of the fact that, at the same time he was advocating continued administrative centralisation within the UK, he was stridently opposing the same feature of governance being proposed for the European Union<sup>66</sup>. This issue is not quite as clear as Gilmour would have us believe, however. Lord Lang, a key architect of the Conservatives' position on Scotland at the time, explained the

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<sup>64</sup> Hogg, Sarah & Hill, Jonathan: "Too Close to Call. Power & Politics – John Major in No. 10", London, Little, Brown & Co., 1995, p248.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p246.

<sup>66</sup> Gilmour, Ian: "Whatever Happened to the Tories – the Conservatives Since 1945", London, Fourth Estate Ltd., 1997, p370.

difficult balance that was being sought then<sup>67</sup>. The Conservatives have always seen themselves as a 'naturally Devolutionary party', in the sense that they wish to devolve as much power as possible not to regional governance, but directly to individual voters. This idea corresponds with Bulpitt's ideas on central autonomy and a contemporary desire to by-pass pockets of socialism in Local Government<sup>68</sup>. As later chapters will show, this disregard for local affairs and organisation was to cost the Conservatives very dearly in General Elections in Scotland. The hardest task, according to Lord Lang, was to find a 'stable ledge' between full integratory Unionism and the Conservatives' brand of Devolution to the individual in Scotland, as with relations with the EU. Lord Lang was sceptical about whether such a point can be found in practice, thus demonstrating the complications incurred when a key principle and the contemporary situation are not in harmony<sup>69</sup>.

One of the key questions in my elite interview schedule, therefore, centred on whether the 1992 anti-Devolution campaign was genuinely being run on key principles, or whether it was a pragmatic strategy, merely justified by, and promoted as, being somehow 'above' the more mundane day-to-day (mainly economic/fiscal) issues<sup>70</sup>? Without fail, every respondent confirmed that the Prime Minister truly believed in the Union and campaigned passionately for its preservation. Ross Harper confirmed the view that the Conservatives could have avoided fighting the Nationalists head on over the issue of Devolution<sup>71</sup>. Such a confrontation would

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<sup>67</sup> Interview, 27.3.01.

<sup>68</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick & Rose (eds.), 1982, p163.

<sup>69</sup> Interview 27.3.01.

<sup>70</sup> Hogg & Hill, 1995, p249.

<sup>71</sup> Interview, 6.8.01.

always be more costly than taking on Labour and diverted attention from combating the main Opposition. Furthermore, it was felt at the time that the advent of a Scottish Parliament would help the Conservatives at Westminster<sup>72</sup>. Nevertheless, a principled stand was taken. The Conservatives were an Unionist party and would promote this message, no matter how unpopular, in Scotland. However, this is not to say that the programme was adopted with no consideration for its possible electoral effects. Lord Strathclyde confirmed that a decision to pursue this tack was taken by a meeting of Scottish Conservative Parliamentarians at the end of 1991 after a worrying by-election loss in Aberdeen<sup>73</sup>. Therefore, being a committee decision, it seems that this policy was constructed on more than just the Prime Minister's feelings.

Another factor that should be considered is that the Party made the calculation that there was little prospect of electoral success in being seen as only the fourth most enthusiastic party for Devolution in Scotland<sup>74</sup>. Instead, the decision was taken to try to sweep up all of the anti-secession voters of all party persuasions, including the SNP, who may well have been in favour of Devolution, but feared the economic dangers of the 'slippery slope' towards independence<sup>75</sup>.

As the campaign progressed, an unforeseen benefit of a heavily pro-Unionist stance became evident. Not only did Scottish voters see the message as important, but the English also began to rally to Mr Major's defence of the Union<sup>76</sup>. Given the heated debates over Europe at

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<sup>72</sup> This does not seem to have been the case in 2001.

<sup>73</sup> Interview, 8.11.00.

<sup>74</sup> Anonymous Interview, 21.6.00.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

the time, any seemingly genuine defence of the integrity of the UK was going to be popular south of the border. Therefore, another electoral reason for standing by this key principle is revealed. Commenting on this point, James Mitchell was prepared to say that he felt that the 1992 Unionist campaign was designed mainly for English consumption<sup>77</sup>. The implications of Lord Lang's comments did not seem to be that strong. This incident, though, does demonstrate the value of the occasional use of dogma to justify contentious policies.

However, as Andrew Gamble noted, the Conservatives in London were "recklessly" no longer thinking of their Scottish members in 'POS' terms by this point<sup>78</sup>. This means that this seemingly regionally specific policy had been made with little consultation with those whom it would affect most directly. That it did not coincide with their opinions on the issue of Devolution made it even more unlikely that it would be successfully implemented north of the border. As Gamble said, the Conservative supporters in Scotland were feeling marginalised. This thesis tests whether such a relationship with the centre broke down Local Government representation, organisation and enthusiasm sufficiently to endanger General Election prospects.

To conclude this brief examination of the effect of a principle on the 'POMP', it should be noted that there can be very little doubt that Mr Major genuinely believed his rhetoric about the preservation of the Union. However, given the above examples of how the message was

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<sup>77</sup> Interview 8.6.00.

<sup>78</sup> Interview 16.3.00. Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish felt that up to 25% of Conservatives in Scotland were in favour of some sort of Devolution at this time to stem the nationalist cause – Interview 25.1.01.

examined for electoral viability along the way, I feel that it would have been modified or underplayed had the conclusions been different.

We have seen how some key issues in Conservatism can have an effect on the way in which the Party is run. The underlying theme has been that there are few core beliefs that can sway the Party from a pragmatic vote-winning approach. However, once a way forward has been decided on, it is not easy to sway the chosen course. If poor policy design and implementation was at the root of the Conservatives' demise in Scotland, the ability to request and implement changes might have saved them. Therefore, we must now examine the structure, organisation and *modus operandi* of the Party to see how key principles or pragmatism were converted into policies and who actually had the power to make and change these decisions.

### ***Organisation Within the Conservative & Unionist Party***

The purpose of this section is to examine which agents and structures influence policy making in the Party; thereby facilitating a more informed assessment of how the Conservatives' 'POMP' may have led to problems in the 'POS' in Scotland. In the brief examination of Conservative philosophy above, we have seen that the Party is quite renowned for seeking pragmatic solutions to contemporary problems, rather than relying on dogma. As dogma has a relatively small role to play in the Conservative 'POMP', actors, agencies and structures are of paramount importance. This is because it is their deeds that have constructed the late Twentieth Century 'POMP' that had such a disastrous effect on the Party's 'POS' and ultimately, therefore, their right to govern in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

The agenda of this section includes an examination of the structure and history of the Party, the office of the Party Leader, deference shown to the Leader, the Central Office, the Party Secretariat and the Party Conference. With particular reference to the 'POMP', the influence of Scottish MPs and Members of the House of Lords, the Scottish Office and Secretary of State and informal situations where important decisions may be taken are explored. As we shall see, all these actors and institutions hold varying degrees of influence in the Party, and are able to affect the 'POMP' accordingly. If peripheral input into 'POMP' was permitted and encouraged, regionally insensitive policies should not have emerged. If they did, the central elite could claim to have been misinformed by their geographically peripheral representatives. A key task, therefore, is to assess who held real decision making power in the Party from 1979-1997?

### ***Structure & Historical Development of the Party – Where are Decisions Made?***

This study will first consider the constitutional structure of the Conservative Party. I wish to discover whether the Party is officially open to the input of all its members around the United Kingdom? If the Conservative 'constitution'<sup>79</sup> suggests that such democracy is officially frowned upon, then the potential for peripheral dissidence rises abruptly. That all power rests with a limited number of, mainly English, officials in Smith Square or the corridors of Westminster would mean that any decision-making powers enumerated to the Conservative Associations in Scotland seem somewhat worthless. Another, sometimes overlooked, aspect of English domination that is not good for the Party in Scotland is the apparent Anglicanisation of

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<sup>79</sup> The Conservatives survive more on informal contacts, tradition and precedents than formalised constitutional rules – Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00. However, there are permanent hierarchical structures to be studied.



its leaders there. The imposition of English officials, or (even more gallingly<sup>80</sup>) the return of Scots from the south with their nationality diluted in favour of the ways of London, has fuelled the view that Scotland has no role or influence in the Party or government of the United Kingdom<sup>81</sup>. Lord Strathclyde confirmed that his Commission into the reorganisation of the Party in Scotland was very keen to address this apparent imbalance<sup>82</sup>.

This chapter is seeking to find out where binding decisions are made in the Conservative Party and whether Scottish Conservatives have sufficient access to these forums? The first task, therefore, is to establish a chain of command within the Party. There is no constitutional document that can immediately identify who has ultimate hold on power. Thus, it is often left to the researcher to infer how the various bodies within the Party relate to each other<sup>83</sup>; inferences that I have made, based on elite interview material, in Chart 2.1. On UK wide and Scottish levels, the Party is divided into three 'strands', the Parliamentary, 'professional' and voluntary<sup>84</sup>.

The most important aspect of the links in Chart 2.1 is that, whilst information may be passed upwards, the Party Leader holds immense power to dictate and make appointments down the chain of command. Remembering that anything that might undermine the cohesion of local

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Lord Fraser, 5.3.01.

<sup>81</sup> Interviews with Lords MacKay of Ardbrecknish and Fraser, 25.1.01 & 5.3.01.

<sup>82</sup> Interview, 8.11.00. Most such intra-party exercises are accused of being exercises that achieve little but perpetuation of the current elite. David Seawright is convinced that this is what the Strathclyde Commission is aiming to do – Interview, 13.4.00.

<sup>83</sup> Garner, Robert & Kelly, Richard: "British Political Parties Today", Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993, p98.

<sup>84</sup> [www.scottish.tory.org.uk](http://www.scottish.tory.org.uk), as depicted in Chart 2.1 (my interpretation of the various texts in this website).

Party organisation in Scotland could be very dangerous for the 'POS', the need for regional sensitivity in these instruments of the Leader's power is clear. Furthermore, whilst the most obvious sideways links have been depicted in the schematic, it is important to note that a well developed network of effective informal links exists that can transcend status and function, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The political/Parliamentary wing is under the control of the Party Chairman. Most of the Party's members are in local Associations; they form the voluntary section. The constituency Associations are affiliated to the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations. The professional strand of the Party is concentrated in the Central Offices in London and Edinburgh<sup>85</sup>. The National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations was set up in 1867 to make contact between the Parliamentary Party and the newly enfranchised urban voters. Even in official pronouncements, this body has been known as the 'handmaid' of the Parliamentary Party<sup>86</sup>.

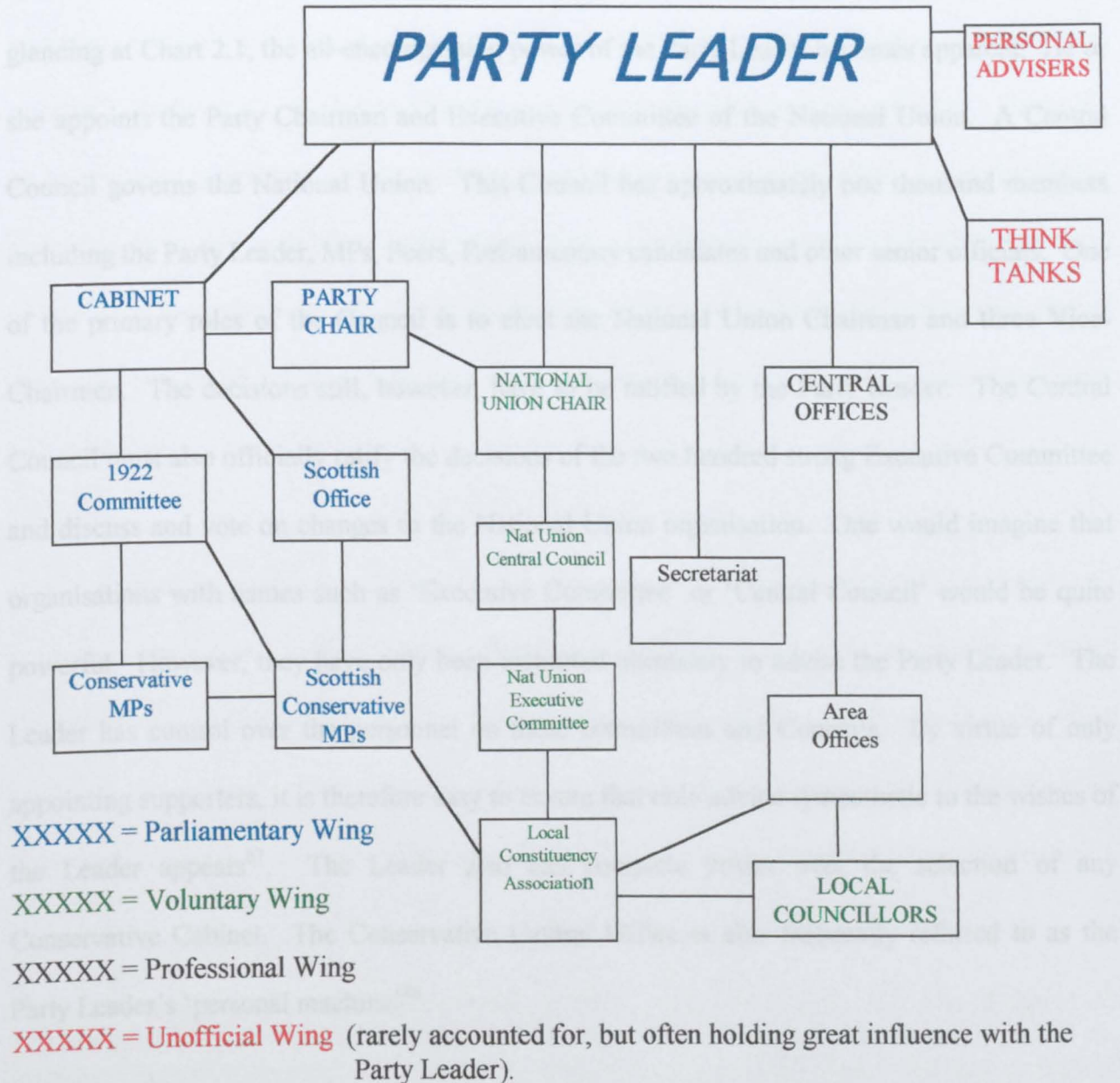
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<sup>85</sup> The reforms initiated by Russell Fairgrieve in the 1970s integrated many of the functions of the Scottish Central Office into Smith Square. However, a balance was maintained as Scottish constituencies were thereafter permitted to send representatives to the national Conference in the same proportions as their English counterparts – Butler & Kavanagh, 1980, p117.

<sup>86</sup> McKenzie, R. T.: "British Political Parties. The Distribution of Power Within the Conservative and Labour Parties", London, Heinemann, 1963, p146.

## The Party Leader 2.1 – Organisation of the Conservative Party

Sources: Garner, Robert & Kelly, Richard: “British Political Parties Today – 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.”, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998, pp92-94, [www.scottish.tory.org](http://www.scottish.tory.org) + Interviews with Lords Sanderson, 30.11.00 & Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01.



## ***The Party Leader***

It should be noted at this point that the Constituency Association members did not have the right, as they do now, to vote in the Party Leadership election process during the era covered by this thesis. After only a brief assessment of the machinations of the various Party bodies and glancing at Chart 2.1, the all-encompassing power of the Party Leader becomes apparent. He or she appoints the Party Chairman and Executive Committee of the National Union. A Central Council governs the National Union. This Council has approximately one thousand members including the Party Leader, MPs, Peers, Parliamentary candidates and other senior officials. One of the primary roles of the Council is to elect the National Union Chairman and three Vice-Chairmen. The decisions still, however, have to be ratified by the Party Leader. The Central Council must also officially ratify the decisions of the two hundred strong Executive Committee and discuss and vote on changes to the National Union organisation. One would imagine that organisations with names such as 'Executive Committee' or 'Central Council' would be quite powerful. However, they have only been instituted ultimately to advise the Party Leader. The Leader has control over the personnel on these committees and Councils. By virtue of only appointing supporters, it is therefore easy to ensure that only advice sympathetic to the wishes of the Leader appears<sup>87</sup>. The Leader also has complete power over the selection of any Conservative Cabinet. The Conservative Central Office is also frequently referred to as the Party Leader's 'personal machine'<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> Interviews with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00 & Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>88</sup> Garner & Kelly, 1993, p125.

Proof of the Party Leader's vast power comes in the form of some of the functions he or she can undertake without technically having to listen to anyone else's advice. These include appointments and policy decisions affecting the whole Party. In 1962, the Scottish Conservatives sent Harold Macmillan their appraisal of many contemporary policy matters, including Britain's possible involvement with the European Community and possible legal reforms<sup>89</sup>. In his reply, the Prime Minister thanks them for their concern and input. However, he leaves them in no doubt where such important decisions are to be taken. He continues by reminding them that such central innovations as the Local Employment Act of 1960 are enough to look after their local needs<sup>90</sup>. Thus, the primacy of the centre is asserted, even at the risk of alienating peripheral workers, who may have felt that their strenuous efforts and views were being ignored.

A good example of a Conservative Leader trying to use the power of appointment to perpetuate her own position came when Mrs Thatcher attempted to remove Scottish Conservative opposition to her policies by appointing Michael Forsyth as Chairman of the Party north of the border. This was an attempt to quash the complaints of leading Scottish Conservatives such as William Whitelaw, George Younger and Malcolm Rifkind by sending a

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<sup>89</sup> This example may seem anachronistic (chronological restrictions are placed upon the Conservative Party Archive at the Bodleian Library). However, its inclusion is merited as the attitudes therein generated my interest in intra-Party relationships and inspired a line of questioning about more contemporary matters in my series of elite interviews. Furthermore, it is important to assess whether the 1980s and 1990s mark an era of change or continuity in Conservatives' organisation; as the presence of radical change would suggest some degree of causality with regard to the Party's 'POS' problems in Scotland.

<sup>90</sup> CCO 2/6/20.

Thatcherite into their midst<sup>91</sup>. Ian Lang's appointment as Secretary of State by John Major was a similar move to try to install a sympathiser, rather than critic, from the Scottish Conservative elite<sup>92</sup>. If a leader is personally domineering and full of conviction, as Mrs Thatcher was, collegiate decision making can disappear. There is no formal method of calling a Leader to account<sup>93</sup>.

Evans and Taylor re-iterate the importance of the Leader's powers, citing his or her influence over the Parliamentary and professional wings of the Party as being crucially important to maintaining a single direction for the Party<sup>94</sup>. Such strength of direction by the Leader corresponds with the 'Political Argument Hegemony' part of Bulpitt's 'statecraft' theory<sup>95</sup>. However, Bulpitt does also note the importance of responding to the wishes and desires of the Party at large when necessary to maintain cohesion<sup>96</sup>. Evans and Taylor also stress the importance of satisfying the aspirations of the Party members to keep them working and believing in the chance of electoral success. Raising the 'spectre of electoral defeat' is often a powerful weapon of the Party Leader to motivate his or her grass roots members<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> Unattributable interview comments, Winter 2000-2001 + Bradbury, Jonathan: "British Regionalism & Devolution", London, Jessica Kingsley, 1997, p79.

<sup>92</sup> Bradbury, 1997, p80.

<sup>93</sup> Whiteley, Paul; Syed, Patrick & Richardson, Jeremy: "True Blues. The Politics of Conservative Party Membership", Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p39.

<sup>94</sup> Evans, Brendan & Taylor, Andrew: "From Salisbury to Major. Continuity and Change in Conservative Politics", Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996, pp279-80.

<sup>95</sup> Bulpitt, Jim: *The Discipline of the New Democracy: Mrs Thatcher's Domestic Statecraft*, in: Political Studies, 1986, 34, pp19-39, p21.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00 and Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

## ***Deference to the Party Leader***

This issue introduces a notion of deference towards the Party Leader; even when his or her policies are contrary to the wishes of the peripheral members at large. Thus, this point constitutes a major reason why Party members have accepted dictates from London and members of the local elite. However, as Lords Fraser and Lang noted, the modernisation of society towards the end of the Twentieth Century led to a reduction in unquestioning deference. This cost the Conservatives dearly in Local Government and General Elections in Scotland as disaffected members either perpetuated rifts, left, or stopped working effectively for the Party<sup>98</sup>. It is interesting to note here that the Party elite in London seemed to be aware of the 'POS' problems that were being caused by organisational failure in Scotland; yet no substantial changes were effected.

Examination of the dynamics above suggests that the Party Leader is almost all-powerful. One would imagine that such domination by a single figure might not sit well with sophisticated members of a modern western democratic party. However, this does not seem to be the case. All Conservatives are primarily concerned with winning elections. Thus, there seems to be a trend for allowing the party's elite to carry on unhindered with the 'POMP.' Garner and Kelly assert that, with regard to winning elections amongst the Party's grass roots:

“(T)here has been a general belief that the best way to secure this goal – rather like an army winning a war – is to allow the leadership discretion and flexibility and to lend wholehearted support to whichever course of action is decided upon”<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> Interviews with Lord Fraser, 5.3.01, Lord Lang, 27.3.01 & Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>99</sup> Garner & Kelly, 1998, p102.

This view was shared by Martin Perry, who asserted that most Conservative constituency members join more for the social advantages than out of a desire to exert political influence. These members acknowledge the greater expertise of the Professional and Parliamentary wings of the Party. Importantly, any potential disquiet is easily stemmed by appealing their desire to seem important. Thus, an occasional visit to a constituency by a Cabinet member for a social event is usually enough to ensure continued loyalty<sup>100</sup>.

Apathy is a continual problem for all parties. One example of it within the Conservative Party is the discontinuation of the Conservative Political Centre's Reference Digest, in the mid-1960s. This guide was produced for members who may have wanted to search for more detailed information about contemporary debates and policies. If 'knowledge is power', then the ready availability such information would have constituted a definite move towards populism/pluralism within the Party. However, too few members took up the offer. It was quietly cancelled in May of 1965. A decade earlier, the Scottish Party elite had complained to General Director in London about the difficulty in educating/generating interest amongst the masses for political and economic issues<sup>101</sup>. Especially in the 1980s, this dynamic became a particularly acute problem for the Conservatives in Scotland as they were being opposed on the Local Government level by well motivated, organised and 'canny' Labour and SNP cells<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> Interview, 24.8.01.

<sup>101</sup> CCO 2/3/13.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.



The serious implications of grass roots apathy for the chances of General Election success must be emphasised when considering the 'POS.' If local members fail to work for the central Party, then electoral failure beckons. A certain lack of interest must be attributed to normal apathy. However, it seems that insensitive treatment by the Party elite is necessary as well as apathy to dissuade grass roots members from working altogether. Very pertinently, such problems accrued at the local level in Scotland when the Conservative Leadership put the members in an impossible situation by asking them to stand up for, and run in Local Government Elections under the shadow of, regionally insensitive central policies. As Garner and Kelly point out, tradition and convention, rather than constitutional rules, dictate how the Party's central elite in London feel that they should be supported by the mass membership. Loyalty is assumed and dissent is neither expected nor tolerated<sup>103</sup>. The presence of 'renegades' is inevitable in large organisations. The Conservative Party suffered in this respect in England over the issue of Europe in the 1990s. Ultimately, however, these dissenters must either defer or leave<sup>104</sup>. Such defections may have been sustainable in England. Working from a more shallow support base in Scotland suggests that any reductions in numbers and cohesion would have put the Party's 'POS' in considerable jeopardy there.

Lord Mackay of Clashfern maintained that there were always avenues open to the membership if they wished to express dissatisfaction. However, such protests never seemed to arise<sup>105</sup>. Lord Fraser noted that serious problems accrued for the leadership from not attending to

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<sup>103</sup> Garner & Kelly, 1998, p100 & (in less strident terms) Anonymous Interview, 21.6.00.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>105</sup> Interview, 22.1.01.

the unexpressed fears of the members, such as unemployment<sup>106</sup>. It seems somewhat harsh to expect the metropolitan Government to attend to inaudible protests. However, it is also reasonable to expect an administration to be aware of potential problems and sufficiently in touch with the needs and desires of its constituents to acknowledge when discontent was growing, even if it had no co-ordinated voice. Ross Harper defended the Party's leaders by saying that they could not be expected to know what local problems were developing in Scotland<sup>107</sup>. This opinion was modified by the assertion that it was, nevertheless, the job of the Secretary of State to keep London informed of events north of the border. The role of the Secretary of State is examined more closely later in this chapter. However, it is already becoming clear that some problems may have gone unnoticed. Thus, a fairly subtle (but nonetheless dangerous) problem such as the failure of local organisation and representation was unlikely to receive much attention from London.

Garner and Kelly cite Robert McKenzie and Richard Rose as having described the Conservative leadership as being like a pre-constitutional monarch. Such a feudal system concentrates power. Such autocracy is reflected in the philosophy of the Party. Such ideology includes a belief in strong leadership, power, and responsibility in addition to unity, discipline, loyalty and respect<sup>108</sup>. Andrew Gamble notes, however, how this ethos may be a cause of the Party elite forgetting their own members. He writes: "It is hardly surprising, then, that the practical problems of organising government have busied Conservative leaders more than the

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<sup>106</sup> Interview, 5.3.01.

<sup>107</sup> Interview, 6.8.01.

<sup>108</sup> Garner & Kelly, 1998, pp100-102.

practical problems of organising electoral support”<sup>109</sup>. A familiar accusation levelled at the Conservatives in the 1980s was that they were over-concentrating on satisfying their affluent supporters in South East England<sup>110</sup>. This provides more evidence to suggest that London might not have been accommodating grass roots members and Local Government representatives in Scotland. This thesis assesses whether this mistake was to manifest itself in poor General Election results in Scotland, as there was insufficient organisation left north of the border to run efficient campaigns?

### ***Conservative Central Office(s)***

Given that effective opposition to the Party Leader is unlikely to come from the periphery of the Party, I will now investigate whether the Conservative Central Office can have any dissuasive effect on a Party Leader who is set in his or her ways? Such a voice could have alerted the Party elite to the problems growing in Scotland. The professional wing of the Party was set up in 1870. There are (for the purposes of this study – more have been added since 1997) eleven Area Offices and, importantly, a separate Central Office for Scotland<sup>111</sup>. Ball claims that these offices have no power over the theoretically autonomous constituency Associations<sup>112</sup>. These Associations guard their autonomy from what are perceived to be the Leader’s ‘machine’ in London or Edinburgh<sup>113</sup>. It should be remembered that this question of

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<sup>109</sup> In: Drucker, H. M. (ed.): “Multi-Party Britain”, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1979, p26.

<sup>110</sup> Butler & Kavanagh, 1988, p269.

<sup>111</sup> The number of areas was increased to twenty-six after the 1997 General Election.

<sup>112</sup> My anonymous interviewee at Central Office (21.6.00) and Lord Sanderson – Interview 30.11.00, substantiated this claim.

<sup>113</sup> Ball, Stuart: “The Conservative Party and British Politics 1902-1951”, London, Longman, 1995, pp20-22.

autonomy between centre and periphery works both ways. Bulpitt is keen to express how the centre would also want to remain aloof from the 'low politics' of the periphery<sup>114</sup>. The Central Offices were instituted to provide information, organisation, campaign co-ordination, marketing and propaganda services for the Party. That comparable integration and funding has not always extended north of the border has caused disquiet amongst Scottish Conservatives for many years<sup>115</sup>.

Even in the era before the centralisation of power in the 1980s, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky was one of only a small minority who were prepared to argue that the Central Office was anything other than a personal civil service for the Conservative Leader. He cites the fact that the Leader does not choose all the personnel in Central Office. The Central Office should not be compared with the temporary party machine of a US Presidential candidate. The personnel in Smith Square do not have such a personal stake in the success of the Leader. Thus, they may be more willing to dissent<sup>116</sup>. Pinto-Duschinsky argues that, especially after the Maxwell-Fyfe Committee findings in the late 1940s, the Central Office should be viewed as the servant of the Party as a whole. Central Office is there to guide, inspire, co-ordinate, assist and provide services for all the local Associations<sup>117</sup>.

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<sup>114</sup> Bulpitt in Madgwick & Rose (eds.) 1982, p161 – my thesis seeks to test and prove the General Election dangers of doing so.

<sup>115</sup> CCO 2/7/13.

<sup>116</sup> Pinto-Duschinsky, Michael: *Central Office and 'Power' in the Conservative Party*, in: Political Studies, 20 (1), 1972, pp1-16, p2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p9.

However, this view that Central Office is not predominantly in the thrall of the Party Leader is not typical, and hardly applicable during the Thatcher years<sup>118</sup>. An example of the minimal influence of Central Office noted even before Pinto-Duschinsky wrote was R. T. McKenzie's assertion that Area Offices, representing Central Office, and thus the Party Leader, were only in control of the work of their provincial areas<sup>119</sup>. He asserts that only the Executive Committee was ever really able to exert some genuine advisory influence with the leadership<sup>120</sup>.

The Conservative Political Centre does canvass the opinion of Party members about policies. This form of consultation would seem to be an essential part of maintaining the 'POS' in peripheral regions, as central policies might be received differently there and require amendment to make them easier to defend at the local level. R. A. Butler was very keen on the institution of this practice. In modern times, however, feedback from non-elite sources away from London is not seriously taken into consideration in the formulation of the 'POMP'<sup>121</sup>.

One important role of the Central Office is to emphasise the importance of the local members at election time. This is a vitally important component of the 'POS.' Even though General Elections are won on national issues, the Central Office boosts local members' self esteem and persuades them to work for the cause<sup>122</sup>. An attempt at this appears in Conservative Newslines, of February 1992 (p6). Like other Central Office publications, this newspaper is

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<sup>118</sup> Anonymous Interview, 21.6.00.

<sup>119</sup> McKenzie, 1963, p237.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

<sup>122</sup> Whitely *et al*, 1994, p25.

usually filled with reports and instructions from the Party elite in London. This editorial, however, departs from the usual and tries to describe how important lower ranked members are to the election cause. Thus, Election Agents, Association Officers and other volunteers are singled out for praise and ego boosting. These individuals and groups form the backbone of the 'POS.'

It is therefore interesting to note that the Party leadership recognises the importance of keeping these workers happy and prepared to put in the effort for the cause. Morale was especially in need of such boosting after the unpopular policies of the 1980s when the prospect of heavy defeat did not inspire Party workers to turn out for their duties<sup>123</sup>. It should always be remembered that such central praise for peripheral workers could often be superficial. For example, the tone of internal memoranda around the General Director's Office even in the mid-1950s was somewhat disparaging towards complaining local agents<sup>124</sup>. This tone never appeared in communications with Scotland. Indeed, a vigorous campaign was launched by Central Office in 1965 to re-assure Scottish Conservatives that they were doing a good job and that neither the Prime Minister nor Central Office had any designs on exerting more dictatorial orders upon them<sup>125</sup>. The whole episode emanated from a report in the Sunday Telegraph of 4.4.65. It claimed that Central Office in London had plans to control every aspect of the running of the Party north of the border. Reforms were in the offing. However, Scottish agents were told in no

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<sup>123</sup> Interviews with David Seawright 13.4.00, Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 & Lord Fraser, 5.3.01.

<sup>124</sup> CCO 2/7/13.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

uncertain terms that they should wait for the genuine report of the Chelmer Committee, which was looking into the possibility of administrative changes<sup>126</sup>.

With regard to the hypothesis under consideration, it is important to note that the Central Office has had a Local Government Department since 1946. This department nominally provides administration and organisation for the National Advisory Committee on Local Government (part of the National Union) and Conference. It also is used for explaining and publicising public policy issues and providing advice for local electioneering. One might expect that this department might be able to represent the needs and desires of the periphery in the metropolis. However, as they tend to fall under the remit of the Party Secretariat, they are just another part of the Leader's power base<sup>127</sup>.

### ***The Party Secretariat***

John Ramsden exposes another part of the Conservative central machine that can cause grievance in Scotland. The Secretariat of the Party is employed to research attitudes around the country. It is not part of the Central Office, but still comes under close control of the Leader as part of the professional support wing of the Party. It cannot be easy to research attitudes in Scotland from London. Edward Heath noted this problem and asserted that the research that he wanted done on Devolution should be done by a Scotsman to ensure good appreciation of local

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid (N.B. the Chelmer Report was not published until 1973).

<sup>127</sup> Rhodes, R.: "Beyond Westminster and Whitehall - The Sub-National Governments of Britain", London, Routledge, 1988 pp209-210.

affairs<sup>128</sup>. This was not the typical attitude shown by Conservative leaders on this issue. Usually, the Secretariat would not have Scotsmen in it, as the Party Leader would be too afraid that the resulting research would be biased away from London and central direction<sup>129</sup>. James Kellas confirms the motivation behind this fear by writing:

“In one sense, most Scots are nationalists. They are conscious of their nationality, prefer to think of themselves as Scots, and can attribute characteristics to Scots in general which are different to those of other nations (for example, England)”<sup>130</sup>.

Thus, the power of appointment is very important. As a consequence of ‘safe’ appointments made by the Leadership, the Secretariat’s findings are usually sympathetic to the wishes of the central elite. Therefore, the Conservatives suffered from poor information about the Scottish situation. In this respect, they lagged behind Labour, who had a well-established research network in place<sup>131</sup>.

We are seeing how the central machine of the Conservative Party is very much geared to the wishes of the Leader. An important dynamic for the hypothesis under consideration is whether there were effective opportunities for Conservative Local Councillors and Party members in Scotland to alert the Party elite as to the damage being done to the ‘POS’ by contemporary ‘POMP’ in Scotland? So far, there seem to be few such opportunities. Therefore, we must now examine other potential sources of information and constructive criticism.

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<sup>128</sup> Ramsden, John: “The Making of Conservative Party Policy – The Conservative Research Department Since 1929”, London, Longman, 1980, p264.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, pp125-6.

<sup>130</sup> Kellas, James: “The Scottish Political System – 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.”, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p124 + Interviews with James Mitchell, 8.6.00 & David McLetchie, 19.1.01.



## ***The Party Conference***

Garner and Kelly argue that the annual Party Conference and its sixty or so support meetings throughout the year can exert considerable influence on the Party Leadership<sup>132</sup>. Especially since the *embourgeoisement* of the Party membership in the late Twentieth Century, Garner and Kelly go on to argue, the Leadership has been forced to take more notice. I tested the credibility of this thesis with my interviewees. As we shall see, their replies did not always agree with the references I had explored. Garner and Kellys' ideas are certainly a revision of the more traditional view, as expressed by, for example, McKenzie<sup>133</sup>. Such works suspect that Conservative Conference delegates do not attend to make radical policy decisions. Rather, the annual Conference is an exercise in showing support for the Leadership<sup>134</sup>. Rubber stamping proposals is the order of the day<sup>135</sup>. McKenzie suggests that some dissidence can surface. However, the membership knows that their protests can usually have little effect. They are happy just if there is some acknowledgement of their views from the Chair<sup>136</sup>. This more traditional assessment of the situation seems to be more realistic. There are few independent studies that are prepared to assign policy-changing power to Conference. Whiteley *et al* try to conclude that the actual situation lies somewhere between the opinions of McKenzie and Garner/Kelly<sup>137</sup>.

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<sup>131</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>132</sup> Garner & Kelly, 1998, p93. Viscount Younger defended this view – Interview, 14.2.01.

<sup>133</sup> McKenzie, 1963, p199.

<sup>134</sup> Lord Fraser noted the 'revivalist rally' atmosphere that permeated many of these meetings in the 1980s – Interview 5.3.01.

<sup>135</sup> Confirmed at interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish 25.1.01.

<sup>136</sup> McKenzie, 1963, p237.

It seems clear that Conference has no more than token levels of influence on the course of the 'POMP.' Nevertheless, there has been one way in which the Conference has been able to exert pressure on Conservative Governments. The event is perhaps the most important public relations event of any year for the Party. Consequently, the Leadership is extremely aware and wary of any form of public internal dissent that could be broadcast from the floor or platform to the general electorate. Examples of the Party elite being embarrassed in this way include Macmillan over housing provision in the 1950s and the way in which Douglas-Home had to devise a compromise deal to save the Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington over Rhodesia in the 1970s<sup>138</sup>.

In modern times, the event is very carefully managed, with constituency Associations being told to alert the Conference organisers of possible dissenters, who are never called to speak. Potentially divisive measures can be carried without discussion. The Leadership are always ready for divisions over Europe. Therefore, the issue is kept off the agenda as much as possible. Now that the main Conference is so carefully managed, the greatest source of potential embarrassment are fringe meetings that attract media coverage; meetings over which the Leadership can exercise less control. Therefore, even though the power is quite minimal, the Conference can be seen, in the pre Leadership election era, to be the arena where Party grassroots members could exercise the most influence over the elite.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p39.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

An interesting pattern emerges from the Party Archive regarding Scottish Conservative Conferences; which diminishes their potential for exercising power over the Leadership in London. Throughout the series of files that I consulted<sup>139</sup>, there were standard letters of invitation for members of the Party hierarchy in London to attend. These were almost always met with a polite refusal citing a previous engagement. These refusals were phrased in deeply regretful tones. It seems that the elite in London, whilst not being worried about having to attend, were most mindful of not appearing to give their Scottish colleagues the ‘cold shoulder’<sup>140</sup>. This observation demonstrates the presence of some elite appreciation of the ‘POS.’ The tone of the Scots’ letters suggests that they almost knew that their invitation would be turned down. More importantly, the refusal of London Conservatives to attend shows how they were not worried that any binding dissident motions could be passed in their absence<sup>141</sup>. Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish noted the importance of the Leader making the effort to be seen at important Scottish events such as Conference or the Cup Final<sup>142</sup>. Peter Thorneycroft and R. A. Butler always reminded Mrs Thatcher to maintain a high profile in Scotland<sup>143</sup>. This she did and had been very popular there during her time as Leader of the Opposition<sup>144</sup>. However, there seems to be little evidence that much actual decision-making power was granted to the periphery through Conference. If these ties with Scotland were not always effective in swaying the Prime Minister from potentially unpopular policies, other possible avenues have to be sought. The next

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<sup>139</sup> Party rules restricted my access to files beyond the mid-1970s. However, it is worth noting these findings as they heavily informed and influenced my interview questions.

<sup>140</sup> For example: CCO 2/2/18 & CCO 2/7/13.

<sup>141</sup> Examples of these exchanges can be found in virtually all the CCO Area Files that I consulted (see Bibliography).

<sup>142</sup> Interview, 25.1.01.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

one to examine is the more formalised relationship between the (pre-Devolution) Executive and Scottish Office/Secretary of State.

### ***The Scottish Office & Secretary of State***

A more formal source of information that influences the Conservative Party in Government is the Scottish Office. The most pertinent question here is whether, during the Thatcher-Major era, the Secretary of State fought for Scottish interests in Cabinet, or was merely a conduit for Governmental decisions north of the border? I put this question to all of my interviewees. They all agreed that the Secretary of State was, and saw himself as, 'Scotland's man in London'<sup>145</sup>. However, there was not unanimity with regard to how effectively this role was played out; the main obstacle being that the Party elite in London rarely believed the gravity of the situation in Scotland being relayed to them by the Secretary of State. That the Conservatives could not arrest their demise north of the border suggests that Scottish public satisfaction with the Secretaries of State as defenders of their interests was minimal. This is important for the hypothesis in hand as such disaffected Scottish voters might have looked to alternative sources of political power if they felt that the *status quo* could not satisfy their needs. This thesis investigates the proposition that Local Government north of the border provided such a viable alternative.

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<sup>144</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>145</sup> The then George Younger's offer to resign over the difficulties being experienced at the Ravenscraig Steel plant demonstrates this attitude well – Interviews with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

It seems that this dissatisfaction was not being noted in London. For example, Lord Strathclyde believed that the Scottish Office played such an important and effective role in looking after Scottish interests that there was never any real need for Devolution<sup>146</sup>. Similarly, Lord Sanderson noted the importance of the Secretary of State in Government by confirming that Mrs Thatcher was prone to asking in Cabinet how any proposed measures for all of the UK would impact north of the border<sup>147</sup>. It should be noted that this important question took on a more and more exasperated tone towards the end of the 1980s<sup>148</sup>. Nevertheless, this role for the Scottish Secretary does conform to the argument put forward against Devolution in the 1993 White Paper<sup>149</sup>. Here, the Major administration stresses how Scotland would be significantly worse off if it relinquished its influence on the British Government, exercised through its own Department, Secretary of State and special Parliamentary arrangements for discussing matters exclusive to Scotland.

The personalities of the various officials at the Scottish Office also had an impact on their effectiveness at standing up to the Prime Minister. As we have seen, being forthright when bearing bad or potentially unpopular news from Scotland can be a challenge to those hoping to further their careers. Furthermore, strength of purpose was also needed in the face of suspicion from colleagues that the Scottish Office was aspiring to higher status and funding than it deserved. This occasional lack of receptiveness towards the Scottish Secretary perpetuated the

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<sup>146</sup> Interview, 8.11.00.

<sup>147</sup> Interview, 30.11.00.

<sup>148</sup> Unattributable interview comment, Winter 2000-2001.

<sup>149</sup> Secretary of State for Scotland: *Scotland in the Union – A Partnership for Good*, Cm 2225, Edinburgh, HMSO, 1993, Chapter 4.

myth north of the border that the Conservative Leadership treated the interests of Scotland as secondary<sup>150</sup>. As Viscount Younger noted, being Scottish Secretary had political responsibilities beyond those associated with some other departments 'just' in charge of implementing measures specific policy areas<sup>151</sup>. In return for support and funding, the Party expected, justifiably in Viscount Younger's opinion, help in all policy areas and votes to be delivered in Scotland.

Mrs Thatcher complains at the poor advice she received about the potentially harmful effects of the Poll Tax in Scotland<sup>152</sup>. It seems, therefore, that David Seawright is correct in his assessment of the power dynamic within her Cabinets<sup>153</sup>. The Prime Minister could get away with being very selective in the advice that she acted on. This again demonstrates the high degree of power vested in the Office of Party Leader and the nature of Mrs Thatcher's personality; a feature to be examined in greater detail in Chapter 4. There seem to be few formal opportunities to affect the leadership style of a Conservative incumbent. However, there must have been some way to get information into Number 10, and have it acted upon. Many of my interviewees gave insights to the more informal machinations of the Party that seemed to have been effective in achieving this.

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<sup>150</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>151</sup> Interview, 14.2.01.

<sup>152</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p622.

<sup>153</sup> Interview, 13.4.00.

## ***Informal Settings***

Andrew Gamble expressed the view that many important decisions within the Conservative Party are taken away from formal settings<sup>154</sup>. Lord Sanderson confirmed this idea<sup>155</sup>. The Party Conference, he asserted, is, as we have seen, a platform for ideas to be tested and policies to be defended, not a forum for changing policies. None of my interviewees were prepared to say that Conference is a serious policy-making arena. The hierarchical nature of the Party was evident in all of the replies, thus further focusing this study on the elite.

More informal, and thus, unrecorded, meetings of members of the 'county set' and others with real influence are a more likely location for where the real decisions are made<sup>156</sup>. Lord Sanderson identified Smith Square policy committees, the Party research department and 'think tanks', such as those headed by Keith Joseph and Alan Walters as being the expert sources of information most trusted and listened to by the Leadership<sup>157</sup>. One avenue open to Scots is, he believes, through the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association, via the National Union. As a former Chairman of the National Union Executive Committee, Lord Sanderson confirmed a definite link to the Prime Minister from that source. Ross Harper, who identified Lord Gould as having been highly influential with Mrs Thatcher, confirmed this. Sir Michael Hurst was also an effective voice for Scottish interests, as demonstrated by the protests at the imposition of VAT

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<sup>154</sup> Interview, 16.3.00.

<sup>155</sup> Interview, 30.11.00.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Andrew Gamble, 16.3.00.

<sup>157</sup> Interview, 30.11.00.

on domestic fuel under Mr Major<sup>158</sup>. Viscount Younger confirmed that the link to the Prime Minister through Smith Square was open and effective<sup>159</sup>.

Lord Fraser felt that personal ties with Prime Ministers are very important. For example, Lord Gould and Betty Harvey-Anderson were trusted as ‘one of us’ in the Thatcher era<sup>160</sup>. Commenting on the same phenomenon, two unattributable sources bemoaned the fact that several non-elected advisors were prone to giving inaccurate or incomplete advice in order to remain in favour with the Prime Minister. They did remain in favour as Mrs Thatcher felt that the Scottish Office, which was giving more accurate information, often bad news, was not to be trusted as it was just seeking to accrue more departmental funding.

At first, the ultra-elitism that the mechanics of such a system implies suggests that the interests of Scottish Conservatives might be insufficiently represented at crucial meetings. However, it may come to pass that such a system might actually benefit Conservatives from north of the border more than an official constitutional system that could be stacked against minorities. The obvious necessity was for Scottish Conservatives to be represented at such ostensibly *ad hoc* meetings. If a Scottish Conservative was part of the ‘in crowd’, he or she would have been able to make a case for Scottish needs<sup>161</sup>. One key point on which this depended was whether sufficient numbers of Scottish Conservatives were being elected to Westminster or senior posts in Local Government.

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<sup>158</sup> Interview, 6.8.01.

<sup>159</sup> Interview, 14.2.01.

<sup>160</sup> Interviews with Lord Fraser, 5.3.01 & Ross Harper, 6.8.01.



## ***The Influence of Scots at Westminster on the 'POMP'***

William Whitelaw was able to represent the Border area well in informal settings<sup>162</sup>. In the same way, once Lord Home became prominent in the Party, an added sense of urgency seemed to permeate the Conservative Central Office's rate of response to Scottish questions<sup>163</sup>. Thus, this process is not a new phenomenon. When Sir Alik Buchanan-Smith succeeded Colonel Patrick Blair as Chairman of the Scottish Conservatives in 1960, he was also able to assert more influence in London. This was demonstrated by his stand against Central Office opinion on licensing laws and ability to draw the Prime Minister's attention to the Scottish Young Unionists' calls for internal Party reforms<sup>164</sup>. These are good early examples of Scottish Conservatives identifying the dangers of allowing local organisation to wither.

Andrew Gamble agreed that Scots who could penetrate the 'county set' and Party elite in London in the Twentieth Century stood the most chance of putting forward ideas that might successfully curb the Powers of the Party Leader and keep Scottish differences on the agenda<sup>165</sup>. However, just being a Scottish MP in London does not bring an individual sufficiently close to the centre of power. The 1922 Committee of the Conservative Party theoretically should be able to exert some pressure on the Leader. It is made up of backbench MPs when the Conservatives are in Office. All MPs except the Leader are on the Committee when the Party is in Opposition.

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with Andrew Gamble, 16.3.01.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>163</sup> CCO 2/3/18.

<sup>164</sup> CCO 2/5/20.

<sup>165</sup> Interview, 16.3.00.

However, this Committee only exerts minimal constraint on the Leader<sup>166</sup>. Even if Scots on the Committee could sway its decisions, the effect on the Leader and Party policy would be negligible. Currently only one Scottish constituency is being represented by a Conservative at Westminster. Therefore, the chances of Scottish interests being promoted/protected through the 1922 Committee membership are slim.

Before the General Election whitewash of 1997, there was a weekly meeting of Scottish Conservative MPs. However, being the rump of the Party and having a questionable mandate north of the border rendered this group virtually powerless<sup>167</sup>. It was almost inevitable that its members became disillusioned with fighting for the rights of fellow Scots and became assimilated into the English middle class<sup>168</sup>.

Lord Strathclyde asserted that Scottish MPs and Peers were very influential during the period 1979-1997, starting from a somewhat minor, but very vocal position<sup>169</sup>. When asked how he thought that these actors would choose between their Party/career and nation, he concluded that both these aspects would be taken into consideration. David McLetchie confirmed that most Scots, including senior Conservatives, are interested in the representation of their national interest within the British state – if not always to the point of calling for Devolution or

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<sup>166</sup> Garner & Kelly, 1998, p108.

<sup>167</sup> Unattributable Interview comment – Winter 2000-2001.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Lord Fraser, 5.3.01 + Brand, Jack: “British Parliamentary Parties – Policy & Power”, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, p225.

<sup>169</sup> Interview, 8.11.00.

secession<sup>170</sup>. Therefore, within the framework of the Conservative Party, it is reasonable to assume that senior Scots would have interests beyond, but not necessarily compromising, Party interests. As we have already seen, such a group of Scottish Parliamentarians was very important in the formulation of the 1992 anti-Devolution campaign. Many such meetings took place over the years<sup>171</sup>. That senior members of the Governments were included in the cohort of Scots at Westminster suggests that they would have been able to exert substantial influence over policy decisions. David McLetchie also noted the high proportion of Scots in Cabinets over the years and felt that, even if they were representing English constituencies, they ensured that Scottish interests were not forgotten<sup>172</sup>. However, in the same way as the effectiveness of the Secretary of State in this role is questionable, it seems that these individuals were not always successful.

Lord Mackay of Clashfern noted another interesting angle on Scottish involvement at Westminster<sup>173</sup>. Confirming the thoughts of David Seawright<sup>174</sup>, Lord Mackay noted how many Scottish business interests were represented through the cohort of Parliamentarians at Westminster. Therefore, the issue of withdrawal of Government help for ailing industries north of the border was particularly pressing and emotive. We will see in Chapter 4 how industrial closures in Scotland hurt Conservative support there not only amongst newly unemployed members of the Working Class, but also amongst the more affluent employers who had been

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<sup>170</sup> Interview, 19.1.01.

<sup>171</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00.

<sup>172</sup> Interview, 19.1.01.

<sup>173</sup> Interview, 22.1.01.

<sup>174</sup> Interview, 13.4.00.

able to deliver significant amounts of votes and funding to the Party. This is a good example of how an element of 'POMP' could cause severe local organisational problems specific to Scotland; a region where the Party could not afford to suffer any losses in representation or organisation. It should be noted that not all senior Conservatives were entirely happy with the potential power of the Scots in their ranks. Because of pressure from Scottish members of the elite, a modicum of 'tartanisation' of otherwise successful policies was necessary. It was felt that such compromises were not always compatible with strong government, which critical situations require<sup>175</sup>.

The question of the effectiveness of pro-Scottish pressure from Parliamentarians remains. Lord Lang noted that there was potential for informing the leadership of what was happening north of the border<sup>176</sup>. Perhaps one of the more effective avenues was through speech writing for the Prime Ministers. However, he conceded that it was impossible to get a message inconsistent with Mrs Thatcher's principles passed. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the Prime Minister's apparent stubbornness, which may have been a useful attribute in times of crisis, is one of the reasons given frequently for the Party's inability to match its English popularity north of the border.

## ***Conclusion***

It seems that even the professional and Parliamentary wings of the Conservative Party can exert little meaningful pressure on the Leader. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that

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<sup>175</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00.

Scots, including Conservatives there, have at times become disaffected with such distant central direction and insensitive policy making. Such disaffection can lead to a failure in the 'POS.' This theme will be taken up again in subsequent chapters, as we see how Conservative centralisation affected Local Government in Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s. This thesis tests whether this dynamic was particularly dangerous for Party General Election chances north of the border. The objective of this chapter has been to show why and where 'POMP' decisions and directives for the Party membership are made in the modern Conservative Party. With regard to ideology, it has been interesting to note that, whilst some of her policies may have seemed radical, there is a sound argument in favour of identifying Mrs Thatcher as a traditional Conservative Prime Minister. This is insofar as she sought pragmatic solutions to contemporary problems; with 'key principles' playing an intermittent, if occasionally vital, role. We have also seen that the vesting of inordinate amounts of power in the Party Leader was not a new initiative in the 1980s.

These examples of continuity are very important with regard to the Scottish question. If the era being studied could be identified as one marked by radical changes in Conservative ideology and/or organisation, causes for the failure of their support in Scotland might have come to light very readily. Such radical changes were not evident, however. The key, therefore, seems to lie not so much in *how* decisions were made, but, rather, in the actual policies that resulted, and how they were received in the various regions of Britain. There is little evidence to suggest that the ideology or structure of the Conservative Party are naturally biased against the

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<sup>176</sup> Interview, 27.3.01.

geographical periphery. For example, if there were more Scottish MPs or if, indeed, the Leaders had been Scottish during the era in question, it seems likely that more attention could have been paid to issues north of the border<sup>177</sup>. As it was, Local and General Election results dictated a relatively low profile for Scottish interests in the higher echelons of power, whilst the more affluent economy of the South East of England further emphasised the north-south divide.

Therefore, in assessing why the Conservatives' 'POS' failed so dramatically in Scotland (with especial consideration to the dynamics of Local Government), it seems more appropriate to consider the nature of society there and measures taken in the 'POMP' as probable causes. This chapter has shown that Party ideology and structure have remained consistent with earlier more electorally successful eras. Therefore, they could not have been significantly to blame for recent Conservative electoral problems in Scotland. Nonetheless, in the following studies, it will be important to bear in mind the most important finding of this chapter. That is to say, that peripheral disquiet has had very little chance of changing the mind of the Conservative leader once he or she has decided upon a course of action in the 'POMP.' This was especially the case if a 'key principle' such as the unitary ideas of the New Right informed the policy. The next chapter considers the role of local politics in Scotland and why it might have been able to wield sufficient influence amongst the electorate to be significantly dangerous to the Conservatives' 'POS.'

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<sup>177</sup> In the post 1997 era, it can be argued that the high number of Scots in powerful positions in the Labour administration gives their interests disproportionate attention by the central Government.

# Appendix A

## UK Voters' Opinions 1979-1997

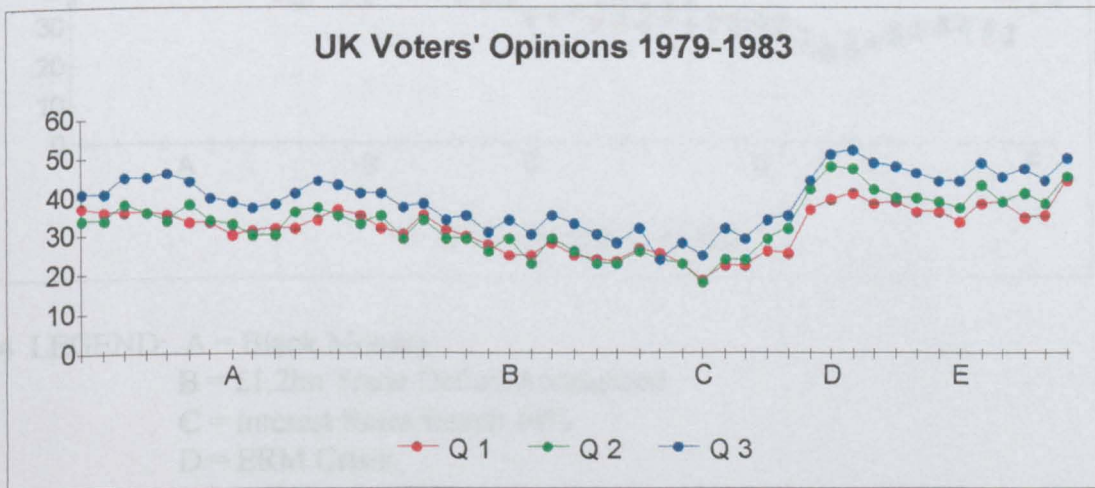
The (%) replies in the graphs below represent (UK-wide) positive answers to:

Question 1 = "If there was a General Election tomorrow, who would you vote for?"  
(Conservatives)

Question 2 = "Are you satisfied with the Government's performance?"

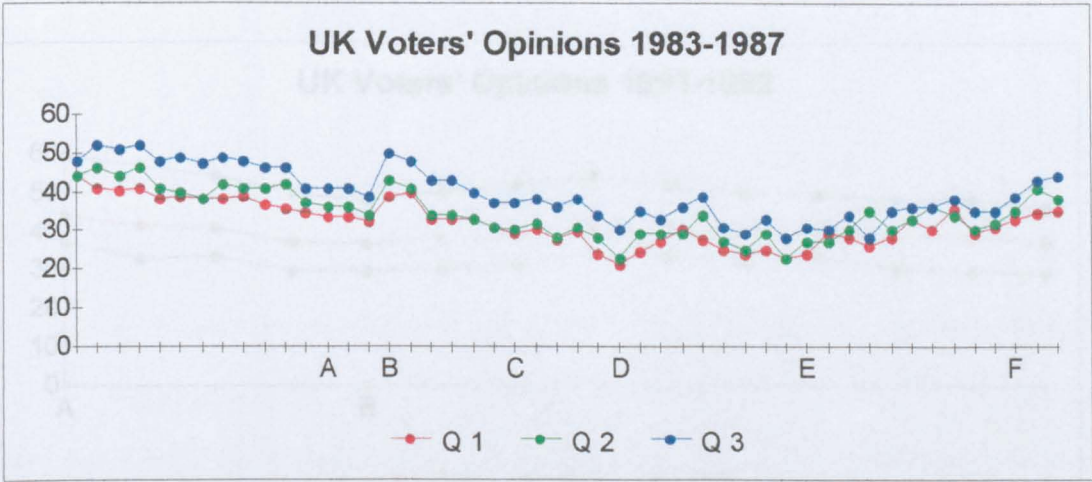
Question 3 = "Are you satisfied with Mrs Thatcher's / Mr Major's performance as Prime Minister?"

The points noted along the X-axes denote important events during the tenures of the Governments. The corresponding peaks and troughs on the Y-axes demonstrate how the electorate reacts more to immediate events than ideological shifts. If the latter were the case, one could expect a smoother plot (rising or diminishing).

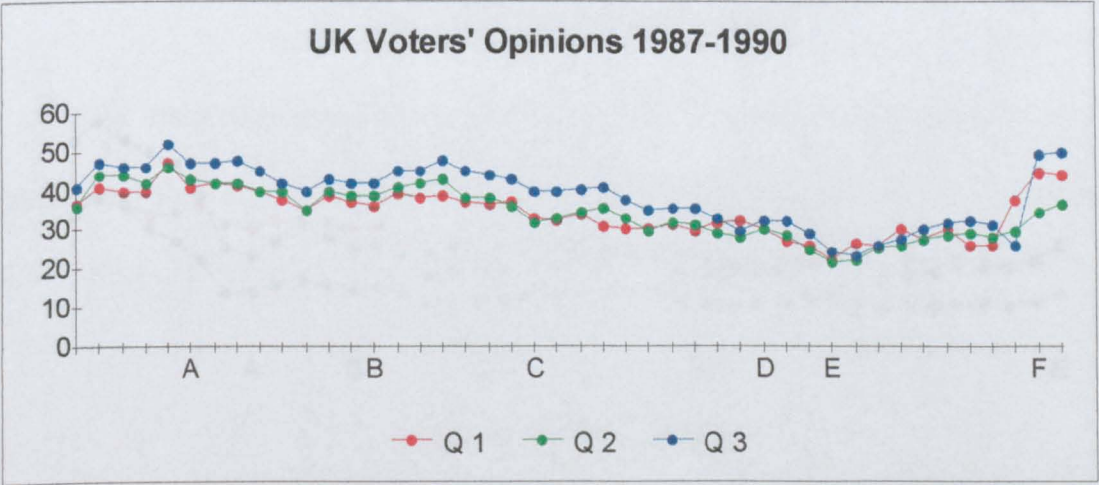


- 2.2 LEGEND: A = New Trade Union Laws + VAT and oil price increases  
B = Unemployment reaches 2m      C = Inner City Riots  
D = Falklands Conflict  
E = Cruise Missile Deployment + Conservative English Local Government Election Victories





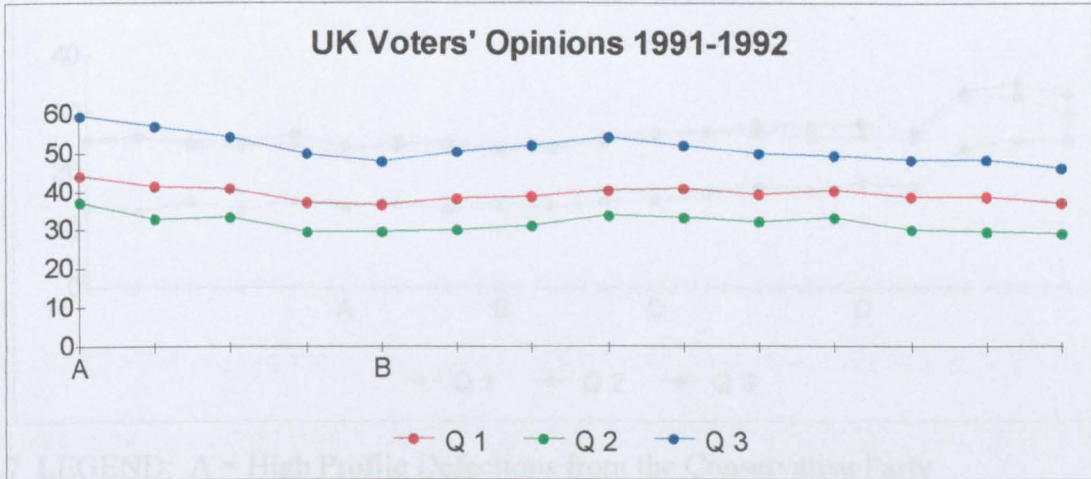
2.3 LEGEND: A = NUM Strike    B = Brighton Bomb    C = Teachers' Strike  
 D = Welfare Cuts + Conservative losses in Local Government Elections  
 E = Rate Capping    F = Conservative Local Government Election Successes



2.4 LEGEND: A = Black Monday  
 B = £1.2bn Trade Deficit Announced  
 C = Interest Rates Reach 14%  
 D = ERM Crisis  
 E = Poll Tax Riots + worst ever Conservative Local Government Elections  
 F = John Major Becomes Prime Minister

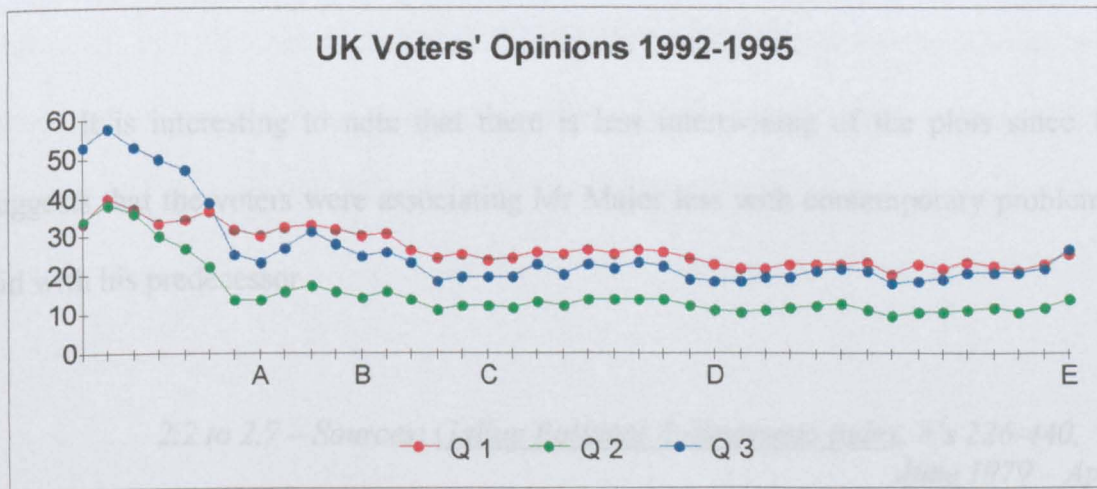


## UK Voters' Opinions 1991-1992

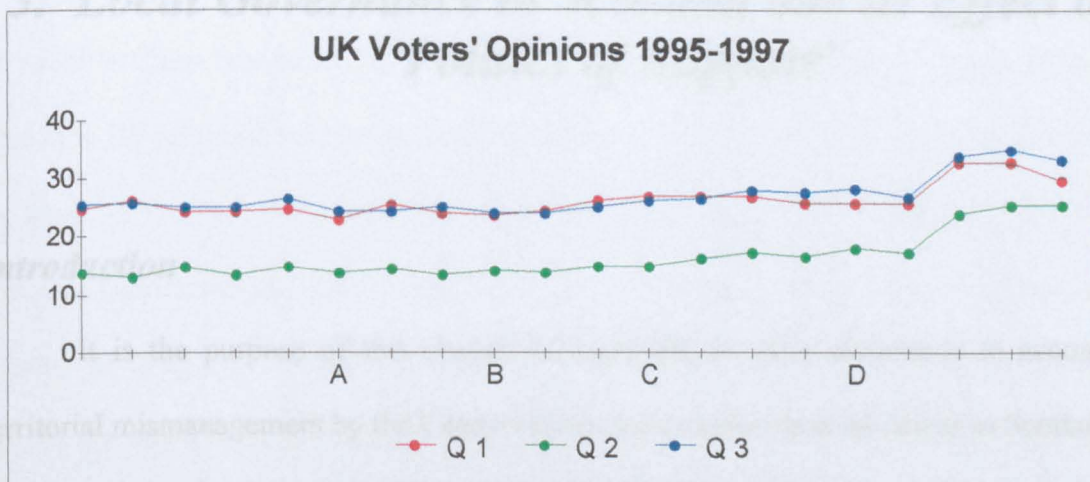


2.5 LEGEND: A = Gulf War  
B = Low Point of Recession

## UK Voters' Opinions 1992-1995



2.6 LEGEND: A = 'Black Wednesday'  
B = Conservative Split over EU  
C = Problems with 'Sleaze'  
D = VAT Imposed on Domestic Fuel  
E = Mr Major Retains Leadership of the Party



2.7 LEGEND: A = High Profile Defections from the Conservative Party  
 B = 'Arms to Iraq' Scandal  
 C = Lowest Mortgage Rates Since 1965 + heavy Conservative Local Government election losses  
 D = 'Cash for Questions' Scandal

It is interesting to note that there is less intertwining of the plots since 1990. This suggests that the voters were associating Mr Major less with contemporary problems than they did with his predecessor.

2.2 to 2.7 – Sources: *Gallup Political & Economic Index*, #'s 226-440,  
 June 1979 – April 1997

And Cook, Chris & Stevenson, John: "The Longman Companion to Britain Since 1945, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.",  
 Harlow, Pearson Education Ltd., 2000, pp23-35.

### ***3. Local Governance in Scotland and its Effect on the 'Politics of Support'***

#### ***Introduction***

It is the purpose of this chapter to highlight an extra dimension to accounts of how territorial mismanagement by the Conservatives turned into electoral defeat in Scotland. In other chapters, we see some traditionally acknowledged sources of danger. The Party's ideology and, more importantly, hierarchical structure suggest that peripheral discontent could not be accommodated. In later chapters, we shall see that there were too many discrepancies between Scottish culture, needs and desires and the preferred 'POMP' of the Party elite in London. What still needs to be addressed, however, is why the Party was not able to rescue the situation in Scotland? We shall see that there was rarely any suggestion that the unitary system or economic or territorial management policies would be changed. The question in hand, therefore, is why was it not possible to win over the Scots to the Thatcherite creed, as had been the case in England?

What is required to answer this question, as suggested by David McLetchie, Viscount Younger and Lord Fraser<sup>1</sup>, amongst others in my elite interview programme, is an assessment of the role of Local Government and the political sub-culture north of the border. As we shall see in this chapter, Local Government plays an important role in Scottish society. It will become apparent that this branch of government, when in opposition hands, was able to rally discontent

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews, 19.1.01, 14.2.01 & 5.3.01.

with, or deflect due praise from, the central Government. Another proposition to be considered is whether Conservative Local Councillors were an important source of local organisation and direction for potential supporters north of the border? If this was the case, an assessment has to be made of the malevolent effect on Conservative General Election chances of losing many of these Councillors in mid-term Local Government elections. These losses were very often due to protest votes against 'POMP' measures<sup>2</sup>. As Norris shows, the electorates on both sides of the border are much more prepared to look beyond the major parties in mid-term Local Government Elections<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the most important question was how difficult would it be to woo back these malcontents? Thus, it may be possible to add to the traditional list of reasons for the Conservative demise in Scotland.

The contents of this chapter include analyses of the role of local politics and culture in Scotland. Specific aspects for consideration include the role and character of the state north of the border, the question of who has a legitimate mandate to govern Scottish territory, the education system, media and religion. Thereafter, the relationships between Scottish local culture and the 'POS' and between Scottish local politics and the 'POMP' are examined. Here, we begin to develop the provision of Council Housing as the optimum manifestation of the special relationship between Scots and their Local Government representatives. To complete the analysis of local factors north of the border, an assessment of the influence of Scottish Conservative members on the 'POMP' and their role in the 'POS', in addition to how centralisation may have soured intra-Party relations, concludes the chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>3</sup> Norris, 1997, p49.

## ***The Role of Local Politics in Scotland***

The first proposition to be explored is whether local politics is indeed pervasive and influential in Scotland and, if so, why? There are several dimensions to this dynamic. Firstly, we should consider whether and why there might be higher levels of state involvement in the lives of Scots? Thereafter, the question of why Scots might be more inclined to look towards more local sources of power due to anti-English sentiments will be considered. Thus, we should investigate the familiar (nationalist) argument that London does not have a legitimate mandate to govern Scotland. This situation was particularly acute for the Conservatives in the 1980s and 1990s when they struggled to win more than a handful of Parliamentary seats north of the border. Finally, we must check to see if there are any cultural/societal factors that make Scots more community minded than their southern neighbours? Even though the provision of several utilities (a very tangible contact between Local Authorities and voters) has been removed from the ambit of Local Government, several long-standing Council functions remain that continue to facilitate significant presence for Councillors in their communities. We are looking for raised levels of state involvement in citizens' lives and more concentration on community life north of the border in order to further the hypothesis that Scottish local politicians can be significant actors in the party political struggle for voters' support in Local Government and General Elections.

## ***The Role & Character of the State in Scotland***

Iain Hutchinson lists several indicators that suggest that there was more state involvement in Scotland than south of the border<sup>4</sup>. Thanks to their affiliation to the British state, many Scots benefited from the industrial nationalisation programmes undertaken by the Attlee administration after the Second World War. As proportionately more Scots were employed by the industries in question, such as steel, mining and shipbuilding, more voters there were directly dependent on the state for employment. Such jobs were not only directly involved with the heavy industries, but also in associated fields such as health care and education provision for the workforce and their families and, importantly, in Local Government itself. As the Weberian model would suggest, increased state involvement in the economy burgeoned a larger bureaucracy, which had to be staffed. More specifically to Scotland, the local civil service was also growing due to relatively poor urban living standards that required a highly developed welfare system to administer poverty relief and housing and healthcare provision. With regard to the public education system, it is important to note that only a small proportion of children were being educated privately in Scotland, even among more affluent families.

During the Thatcher years, there was an ideological opposition in central Government to too much state involvement in the lives of individuals. Nevertheless, somewhat paradoxically, the central Government imposed itself frequently on sub-national levels of administration to prevent Local Authorities from acting too independently, thus trying to re-assert central control<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> In: Devine, T. M. & Finlay, R. J. (eds.): "Scotland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century", Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1996, pp46-61.

<sup>5</sup> For example, there were 143 Acts of Parliament relating directly to the conduct of Local Government from 1979-1992 – Wilson, David & Game, Chris: "Local Government in the United



As the subjects of housing, the Poll Tax and industrial closures demonstrated (to be examined more fully below and in subsequent chapters), this was an attempt to have a dramatically restraining effect on Scottish Local Authorities, as they relied heavily on central subsidy. As the central Government provided so much funding, one would have expected them to be able to wield considerable power and influence over the directions taken by Local Authorities in Scotland. However, even with the Scottish Office supposedly in place to guarantee central control, the spirit and, often, practice of quasi-autonomy was retained in Local Government north of the border.

Perhaps the most important cause of increased importance for local politicians in Scotland was their involvement in housing provision. That topic provides evidence for testing the hypothesis throughout this work. For the purposes of this section, it is essential to recognise that Scotland had more state-controlled housing than anywhere outside Eastern Europe in the second half of the last century<sup>6</sup>. This meant that voters there were likely to have close ties with local politicians. These ties were most often manifested in terms of the 'POS' when Local Councils managed to 'buy' votes with low rents and other inducements<sup>7</sup>. Later in this chapter, the Conservative 'Right to Buy' project is given fuller consideration. It sought to wean voters away from such close ties with their Local Authorities. In Chapter 5, we shall examine the important issue of how the Conservatives in London tried further to halt the problem of Opposition Council influence on the electorate with subsidy reductions and regulations on how

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Kingdom", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1994, p102. Chapter 5 of this thesis investigates central control of Local Government more closely.

<sup>6</sup> Regional Trends, Number 20, 1985, p61 & The Daily Telegraph, 10.5.79, p18.

Local Authorities could spend their incomes. Thereby, the Conservative elite caused the sort of centre-peripheral friction that encouraged Scottish Labour Councils to disrupt the 'POMP' as much as they could within their statutory powers<sup>8</sup>.

There are several other persuasive reasons that suggest that Scottish Local Government may have been able to stand up to London and thus enjoy enhanced credibility in communities north of the border<sup>9</sup>. Firstly, many Labour MPs from Scotland started their political careers on Local Councils. Consequently, when they reached London, their backgrounds suggested that they were more likely to continue to defend the independence of Local Government. Secondly, and somewhat ironically for the Conservatives, the professionalisation of Local Government that had been encouraged by the Party before the War meant that Local Councillors and other officials were becoming more confident and competent in their dealings with London. Thirdly, and very importantly, Local Government in Scotland seems to have a much greater mandate than in England (to be discussed further, below).

We are beginning to see how Local Government, and the agents thereof, seem to have an important role in Scotland<sup>10</sup>. Whilst developing this idea through this chapter, a vital question to

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00 + Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>8</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>9</sup> Iain Hutchinson in: Devine & Finlay (eds.), 1996, pp46-61.

<sup>10</sup> This thesis seeks to emphasise the especial 'POS' importance to the major parties of having strong Local Government presence in Scotland. Rallings *et al* note potential General Election problems that could be caused by losing control of important local bodies that might be able to help in the mobilisation of support. Rallings, Colin; Thrasher, Michael & Johnston, Ron: *The slow death of a governing party: the erosion of Conservative local electoral support in England 1979-1997*, in BJPIR, Vol. 4, no. 2, June 2002, pp271-298, p272.



be investigated, therefore, is how did this dynamic affect the Conservatives in General Elections? Presently, further assessment must be made of why Scots might be inclined to look towards more local sources of political power.

### ***Who Has a Legitimate Mandate to Govern Scotland?***

In Chapter 4, we shall see how the Conservatives in London believed the Devolution/nationalism question to be dead after the failed referenda in 1979. We will discover the error in this assumption and will be reminded by Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, amongst others, that every Scot holds nationalist sentiments to some degree – if not always to the point of supporting Devolution or secession<sup>11</sup>. Within the sphere of local governance, these feelings are manifested in the question of who has a legitimate right to govern Scottish territory<sup>12</sup>? One familiar nationalist argument is that a distant Government in London hardly has the right to govern in Scotland, especially if it has won hardly any or no Westminster seats north of the border<sup>13</sup>. More traditional Conservative forms of territorial management ('statecraft') seemed inclined to agree tacitly with this proposition and sought to deflect criticism by the employment

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, 25.1.01. 49% of respondents to Gallup in May 1996 preferred the description 'Scottish first, British second', Gallup Political & Economic Index, #429, May 1996, p6.

<sup>12</sup> This problem arose almost instantly after the Act of Union in 1707, when it was perceived that London was exerting more managerial control over Scottish affairs than had been expected/agreed upon – Daiches, David: "The Paradox of Scottish Culture: The Eighteenth Century Experience", London, Oxford University Press, 1964, p3.

<sup>13</sup> This sentiment is expressed frequently in opinion polls; for example MORI unpublished data May 1981, Gallup Political Index, #313, September 1986, p18 & #429, May 1996, p5. It is also mentioned often in the press; for example The Observer, 24.9.95, p10 & The Guardian, 22.4.92, p2 (a report on a refusal by Strathclyde Regional Council to implement any more Conservative Local Government legislation, as the Council believed that the Major Administration had no legitimate mandate to impose such 'job threatening' measures).

of a local elite to manage affairs north of the border<sup>14</sup>. It may be argued that this tactic was used so that the central hierarchy could remain aloof/insulated from the 'low politics' of the geographical periphery. However, even if this was the case, the happy coincidences for the Party were that they could not be accused of governing from afar in a colonial style<sup>15</sup> and the 'POMP' was rendered sensitive to the particular constraints of Scottish society. We should bear in mind that only on the geographical periphery did the Conservative elite in London ever seem to countenance the use of any form of agency or conduit for the implementation of their policies. Even though central control of this situation was very tight, it is important to note that Conservatives in London could not appeal directly to voters at extreme distance, as they were able to do in most areas of England.

The (nationalist) mandate question gives significant substantiation to the proposition that Scottish voters might be more inclined to look to local sources of power. Through the 1980s and 1990s, there were frequent calls for the institution of a Scottish Parliament<sup>16</sup>. This issue brings to light serious misconceptions manifested in the Conservatives' 'POMP.' They believed that the Devolution question was dead and that the Scottish Office was a sufficient guarantor of Scottish interests to preclude the need for a Scottish Parliament<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, their over-concentration on the governance of affluent southern England also led to the belief that the geographically peripheral English regions were entirely satisfied with unitary government from Westminster.

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<sup>14</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick & Rose (eds.), 1982, p146.

<sup>15</sup> As argued by Hechter, 1975, p161.

<sup>16</sup> Unpublished MORI data from November 1981 saw 47% of Scots in favour of a devolved Assembly as the best solution. This figure was 44% in March 1988. Gallup recorded 61% of respondents in favour of some sort of Assembly (Gallup Political Index, #313, September 1986, p19) and 69% in May 1996 (Gallup Political Index, #429, May 1996, p6).

As in Scotland, this does not seem to have been the case<sup>18</sup>. In the early 1990s, Labour identified a desire in sections of the electorate for Devolution to the English regions<sup>19</sup>; and saw this policy as part of the ‘unfinished business’ of the de-railed referenda proposals of 1979. Especially with regard to their attitude towards Scotland, it should be noted that, at this time, the Conservatives never showed any such enthusiasm for devolving power away from the unitary Parliament in Westminster. Iain Lang was quoted in The Guardian as saying: “You can’t just carve off a little bit of sovereignty, and send it up to Edinburgh or Cardiff and let everything go on as before”<sup>20</sup>. He acknowledged that Devolution to Scotland and Wales would lead to calls for English regional assemblies; and was adamant in his opposition to all.

Even though the attitudes towards Devolution expressed in the Conservatives’ ‘POMP’ seemed only to have domestic implications, it should be remembered that, especially during Britain’s Presidency of the EU in 1992, the rest of Europe was granting much more importance to regional rights<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, it was something of a paradox to witness the Major administration bargaining for Britain’s national rights within the EU, whilst at the same time denying these rights to the various nations and regions of the UK. Thus, the Government’s policies were making it somewhat of a mini pariah outside British borders, as well as within. Whilst this is not an appropriate forum to discuss Britain’s relations with the EU in the 1990s, it is important to note that domestic support was lost because of the continuing bitterness and Conservative

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00.

<sup>18</sup> Austin Mitchell in: Critchley, Julian (ed.): “Britain – A View from Westminster”, Poole, Blandford Press, 1986, p63.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00 + The Guardian, 2.11.90, p2, 25.2.91, p23, 9.3.92, p23, 10.1.95, p4 & 14.1.95, p7.

<sup>20</sup> The Guardian, 15.10.94, p7.

intransigence on this issue<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, the rather hypocritical Conservative territorial management strategy was, yet again, causing them problems in the 'POS.'

The Conservatives themselves even tried to use a version of the mandate argument after their 1997 Election defeat. Michael Howard claimed that the Labour Government in London still did not have the right to devolve powers to Scotland, as there were still many opponents to Devolution there<sup>23</sup>. This poses the question that if Labour had no mandate in Scotland after seeing off every Conservative MP north of the border, how were the Conservatives able to claim legitimacy for their policies when they only commanded a handful of seats through the 1980s and 1990s? The key to the Conservative claims lie in ideas on unitary systems of government and their notion of the supreme authority of Parliament in London. Such theories can be found in the work of constitutional scholars such as A. V. Dicey, and the resultant policies are examined throughout this thesis. If these arguments did not entirely convince the Scottish electorate, it is possible to see how more local forms of government could have been seen as a more legitimate alternative.

There was no suggestion that the Conservatives of the 1980s and 1990s ever countenanced levels of administrative Devolution that would have approached a quasi-federal system. Nonetheless, it is worth investigating what sort of relationship the Scottish electorate had with whatever forms of local governance that were available. It may be that Scottish Local Councils played a significant role in the lives and voting intentions of their constituents.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 4.7.92, p39.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews with Andrew Gamble, 16.3.00 & Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

Therefore, the Conservatives in London would have been well advised to take account of this situation and engage in Scottish local politics in order to promote and protect their 'POMP.' On a constitutional level, organisations such as the Constitutional Convention and other campaigns for a Scottish Parliament came into being mainly as a consequence of the mandate question. It is possible to conclude, however, and more pertinently for this thesis, that, on a day-to-day basis, Scottish voters would look to their local representatives for help and political direction much more readily than they would look to London. The closer one gets to the capital, it is reasonable to conclude, as is borne out by the election results in Chapter 7, that this effect decreases. Now we should look to see whether there were any structural aspects of Scottish society that would have hindered the Party's attempts to make any electoral headway there.

### ***Scottish Local Culture & the 'POS'***

This section assesses how certain characteristics of Scottish society could have contributed to an enhanced role for Local Councillors there. These characteristics form Scottish political culture – a definite subculture in the British polity – and constitute a key constraint on the 'POMP'<sup>24</sup>. As we shall see, the particular social and economic circumstances of Scottish life have informed the nature of the political (sub)culture there. If we find that these circumstances have given rise to an enhanced role for Local Councillors in the 'POS', then the Conservative elite in London would have been well advised to take this cultural difference into account when formulating their 'POMP.'

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<sup>23</sup> The Guardian, 7.5.97, p5.

As Grant notes, a frequent problem with the term 'political culture' is that it is often used as a catch-all term to explain anything about a society that "(C)annot be accounted for in any other way"<sup>25</sup>. In this instance, however, we shall see that the use of the term is appropriate as the attitudes and beliefs of the Scottish voters can be traced to specific events and practices such as the formation of tightly-knit communities in an industrial town or the preponderance of Local Authority housing. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that this culture seems to be a relevant factor in explaining why Local Councillors have significant influence in Scottish society.

"The Civic Culture", by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) is often quoted as an important assessment of the notion of political culture<sup>26</sup>. This text emerged from the expansion of opinion polling in the 1950s. It presents the hypothesis that the central tenet of political culture is the attitude of the citizens towards authority. Within this framework, British society of the time is identified as conforming to a 'civility model', which is characterised by homogeneity, consensus and deference<sup>27</sup>. As Moran infers and Lords Fraser and Lang were most keen to point out, these traits were not to be seen in Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s<sup>28</sup>. These three sources agree that increases in affluence and populism in late Twentieth Century Britain severely diminished the sense of deference amongst citizens. More particularly with regard to Scotland, homogeneity and consensus with the rest of the British population was unlikely due to the

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<sup>24</sup> 'Political culture' being defined as: "The attitudes, beliefs and values which underpin the operation of a particular political system", Wyn Grant in: McLean (ed.), 1996, p379.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p380.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in: Moran, Michael: "Politics & Society in Britain – An Introduction. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1989, p34.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp34-35.

different histories of the various nations. With regard to this thesis, this point is most relevant when considering whom many Scots believe to have authority to govern there. It is the purpose of this chapter to suggest that more local sources of government may have seemed more effective and legitimate to many Scots than the distant administrations in London. Thus, a distinct characteristic of the Scottish political culture could have been damaging the Conservatives' 'POS.' It now remains to investigate how this culture developed.

We shall hear in Chapter 4 how Trade Unions played an important party political role in favour of Labour north of the border in the 1980s, some time after they had ceased to be so influential in England. This atmosphere suggests that there may have been a higher degree of communitarianism in certain parts of industrial urban (and, hence, more left-leaning) Scotland<sup>29</sup>. Going back further in Scottish cultural history, one finds the close ties of the clan system and rapid dense urbanisation as causes of greater awareness and empathy with one's neighbours<sup>30</sup>. Other indicators for raised levels of closer community spirit in Scotland include the incidence of towns being dominated by a single employer and, perhaps as a consequence of all these structural factors and their contemporary counterparts, a heightened sense of civil society and 'fellow feeling'<sup>31</sup>. Given these conditions, it is unsurprising to find that the Thatcherite

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<sup>28</sup> Moran, 1989, pp39-49 + Interviews with Lords Fraser, 5.3.01 & Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>29</sup> Stewart Ransom *et al* in: Stoker, Gerry (ed.): "The New Management of British Local Governance", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999, p103.

<sup>30</sup> M. Lynch in: Houston R. A. & Whyte I. D. (eds.): "Scottish Society 1500-1800", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p86 + R. A. Dodgshon in *ibid*, p169.

<sup>31</sup> Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00, James Mitchell 8.6.00, Anonymous at Central Office, 21.6.00, Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00, David McLetchie, 19.1.01 and Lord Fraser, 5.3.01 + Chitnis, Anand C.: "The Scottish Enlightenment. A Social History", London, Croom Helm, 1976, p95 + Waszek, Norbert: "The Scottish Enlightenment & Hegel's Account of 'Civil Society'", London, Kluwer, 1988, p212.

individualist creed, which had been more readily adopted in affluent England, was not so popular north of the border. Lord Lang asserted that the Conservatives were eventually forced to concede that the stronger community-based culture that existed in urban Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s was not compatible with the promotion of individualism by the Governments of the time<sup>32</sup>.

The Conservatives would have benefited from the preservation of more socially inclusive groups that were inclined towards them in Scotland<sup>33</sup>. Such groups, by their nature, bring like-minded voters together in a social setting and help to foster a kindred spirit, which can herald a 'conservative nation'<sup>34</sup>. In rural areas especially, trans-generation ties with local Territorial and Regular Army regiments (which stemmed from Imperial times) served as such an organisational force for the Conservatives due to the social networks that they engendered<sup>35</sup>. A dismantling of the Conservative communities that had built up around them followed the demise of these regiments<sup>36</sup>. Generally in rural Scotland, there is also an absence of socially inclusive activities, which are present in England, such as village cricket<sup>37</sup>. This further reduces the chance to build Conservative networks amongst the electorate. The greater geographical distances involved in rural Scotland also lead to more of a lack of cohesion than south of the border. Scottish cities have been more liberal/pragmatic traditionally. Therefore, it has not been possible for the Party to take advantage of the smaller distances involved there.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview, 27.3.01.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

<sup>35</sup> Interviews with: Anonymous, 21.6.00, Lord Fraser, 5.3.01, Lord Lang, 27.3.01 & William Paterson, 13.9.01.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid (4 interviewees).



Raised concern and awareness of local issues was not always the case in urban Scotland, however. Harvie notes that after Scottish Parish Councils were abolished in 1929, forty years of indifference to local democracy followed<sup>38</sup>. In the 1950s (just as somewhat in the 1980s), the Conservatives had little direct interest in Scottish Local Government Elections. The majority of non-Labour Councillors stood as Independents, Progressives in Glasgow or Moderates in Edinburgh. Nevertheless, despite the resultant lack of Conservative Councillors, the Party still held 35 seats at Westminster at this time<sup>39</sup>. Thus, if adequately supported, this work's hypothesis should only be applied to the Thatcher-Major era.

Even though Scottish Local Government might not have been so politicised in the post War years, the basis of the situation of the 1980s and 1990s was being laid in this period. The issue of Local Authority rent levels was becoming important. Indeed, this was key to Labour strategies in the 1980s and 1990s<sup>40</sup>. The Conservatives were notable for their absence from sub-national affairs. They were to pay for this deficiency when in national Government as they did not have local organisation in place to 'sell' policies or run General Election campaigns<sup>41</sup> - essential functions in the 'POS.' This section can conclude that local affairs do seem to play a very important role in Scotland. The precise effect of this on General Elections forms the evidence for the hypothesis throughout this work. It seems that any party would need a highly developed and well-organised membership and cadre of Local Government representatives north of the border to ensure that they could negotiate and take advantage of the unique circumstances

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

<sup>38</sup> Harvie, 1994, p141.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>40</sup> Interviews with Lords Strathclyde, 8.11.00, and Sanderson, 30.11.00.

there. The following sections analyse further aspects of Scottish local culture to see how they might have affected the Local-Central Government relationship and precipitated the decline of the Conservatives north of the border.

### ***The Scottish Education System***

This element of society is a factor that the Conservatives have seen as part of their demise in Scotland. It is important to note that this element of society is controlled on a local level. Therefore, not only might it put forward opposition to the central Government, but it could also serve to undermine Conservative organisation specifically in Scotland. Therefore, the potential for substantial damage to the Party's General Election support north of the border is evident.

Scotland has always been proud of having its own educational system substantially free from control from London. Consequently, it was not surprising when this independent institution became a focus for opposition to Conservative 'POMP.' The educational establishment in Scotland became much more politicised after the main teachers' union, the Educational Institute of Scotland, joined the (S)TUC in the 1970s<sup>42</sup>. In the early 1980s, the funding and organisation of education needed attention in both England and Scotland. However, Keith Joseph had to delay until circumstances and finances were available to fix both cases. This is an example of unitary 'POMP' causing unpopularity in Scotland. As James Mitchell noted,

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<sup>41</sup> Interviews with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 and Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 – perhaps the most startling revelation was the instances related to the Secretary of State of promotion being refused to teachers who did not support Labour.

unitary government may be easier to manage in terms of less bureaucracy<sup>43</sup>. However, one of its weaknesses is the potential for peripheral protests. David McLetchie told of how even the Scottish Conservative Party tried to militate against the strictly unitary nature of affairs in the early 1980s as they sensed the problems that it would bring<sup>44</sup>.

The teachers' strikes in Scotland during the 1980s were very damaging to the Conservatives. The EIS came up with many clever strategies, which co-opted parents into disliking the Conservatives almost by default. Strikes and school closures were called only in the constituencies of Government ministers, thus turning potential or existing Conservative supporters against the Party whilst causing no damage to Opposition MPs<sup>45</sup>. Furthermore, as part of their role as local activists, teachers were none-too-subtly indoctrinating their pupils against the Conservatives. Viscount Younger recalled how he would receive letters from schoolchildren as part of class projects that were clearly written or dictated by teachers and were blatant in their anti-Government stance<sup>46</sup>. Such deeds might not seem to be acts of radical or immediately effective opposition. However, the pupils were being socialised against the Conservatives and would be unlikely to vote for the Party in years to come. Another effect of this trend in Scottish education to be felt sometime afterwards was when graduates of the system entered Local Government and the media and organised protests against the central Government because of their natural left-leaning inclinations that had been formulated in their early years.

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<sup>43</sup> Interview 8.6.00.

<sup>44</sup> Interview, 19.1.01.

<sup>45</sup> Interviews with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish and Viscount Younger, 25.1.01 & 14.2.01.

<sup>46</sup> Interview, 14.2.01.

The concept of unitary governance plus a lack of funding meant that reforms could not be introduced as quickly as the teachers may have liked; thus precipitating protests from the EIS. A half-finished package could have been rushed through; but this would not have been satisfactory. Furthermore, once the reforms, as formulated by senior Scottish education officials, had been implemented, the teachers, through no fault of their own, were not of sufficient calibre to deal with the extra demands. This extra pressure caused more resentment, which was focused on the Conservative Government<sup>47</sup>.

At the beginning of the Major era, an attempt was made to remove power from the educational establishment in order to prevent it from organising opposition to the Government in Scotland. Michael Forsyth admitted that there was a plan to put control of education into the hands of the Scottish Office as part of the 'opting-out' proposals. Thereby, it was hoped that fewer schools would be under the direct influence of left-leaning Scottish Local Authorities<sup>48</sup>. Neither plan came to fruition, despite a final effort to encourage opting out made by the Government in 1994. By then, so much power and central subsidies had been wrested from Local Authorities with regard to education in Scotland that it seemed that schools would have to opt out in order to remain financially viable<sup>49</sup>. However, the Government was not able to push through the final revisions, especially as elections to the new Unitary Councils were imminent. The Conservatives could not afford to suffer any more losses in Local Government north of the border because, as this thesis investigates, here was a source of effective local organisation to support the contemporary 'POMP.' Education was a powerful force for political socialisation at

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Times Educational Scottish Supplement, 17.5.91, p21 & 21.6.91, p5.

a local level in Scotland. Another vital influence on Scottish society was the media. Its effect on the political culture north of the border is examined now.

### ***The Scottish Media***

Throughout this thesis, the importance of communication between the major political parties and the electorate is stressed. Success in the 'POS' is dependent on being able to 'sell', defend or attack measures in the 'POMP', as appropriate. This section seeks to examine the effect of the media on Scottish political culture and how the Conservatives and Opposition parties used it to further their causes in the 'POS' north of the border.

Whilst they do not rival the readership figures of some English regional publications such as the Manchester Evening News (160,000)<sup>50</sup> or Liverpool Echo (145,000), many Scottish newspapers reach a significant proportion of their catchment area populations. For example, the Glasgow Herald has a circulation of approximately 92,000, The Daily Record 70,000, The Scotsman 80,000, the Edinburgh Evening News 72,000 and the Aberdeen Evening Express 65,000. Thus, given their relatively high readerships, Scottish newspapers are vitally important tools for reaching the electorate and shaping the political culture north of the border.

The received wisdom on the role of the media in Britain is that it conserves or reinforces, rather than actively changes, the political attitudes of voters<sup>51</sup>. Therefore, according to this

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 20.5.94, p23.

<sup>50</sup> All circulations from [www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk](http://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk).

<sup>51</sup> Harrop, Martin: "Voters", in: Seaton, Jean & Pimlott, Ben (eds.): "The Media in British Politics", Aldershot, Avebury Gower Ltd, 1987, p45.

model, the Scottish media in the 1980s and 1990s should have reflected the more leftist inclinations of the general population north of the border. Similarly, the Reinforcement Thesis suggests that the Conservatives should have enjoyed better press coverage in England, where the economy was more buoyant and the Party was enjoying resultant electoral favour. On initial inspection, it appears that these patterns were borne out.

It was perceived amongst the Conservative Party elite that some branches of the Scottish media (The Daily Record and Glasgow Herald, especially) seemed to lean to the left and were keen to promote pro-Devolution and anti-Government agendas. Lord Lang noted how the Party in Scotland always had to work extra hard for electoral success due to the inherent anti-Conservative characteristics of society and the media there<sup>52</sup>. An important question to consider is whether such publications were promoting their own agendas, reflecting the general mood amongst the Scottish electorate, or were being astutely used/manipulated by Labour and the Nationalists? In any case, the Opposition parties in the 1980s and 1990s were grateful for such a voice for their campaigns on issues such as Devolution or the Poll Tax<sup>53</sup>. Consequently, it was not difficult for the Left to instigate the view that Conservatives were actually anti-Scottish every time that a locally unpopular policy was implemented. This was particularly difficult for the Conservatives if the policy in question was unavoidable due to the necessities of economic

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<sup>52</sup> Interview, 27.3.01.

<sup>53</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p619 + Interview with Lord Fraser, 5.3.01 – it must be remembered that this interview material is being utilised not especially for an accurate record of what was actually happening in Scotland. Rather, it is being referred to so that we may know what the Conservative Governments of the time perceived to be the case, and how they adopted their ‘POMP’ as a result.

efficiency. Such opposition was easier to organise and defend in Scotland, where the Conservatives were in too inferior a position to effectively counter<sup>54</sup>.

Given the anti-Conservative bias that was perceived and the fact that there was no equivalent of a sympathetic tabloid such as the Daily Mail or broadsheet like The Daily Telegraph, it seems that the Conservative Cabinet did not have a ready conduit for their message in Scotland. An obvious problem of the absence of such support in the media is that voters in Scotland might never hear or read properly balanced reports or editorials. The Conservatives suffered badly from this<sup>55</sup>. In a society whose media seemed to be permeated with anti-Conservatism<sup>56</sup>, it was never going to be easy to persuade voters of the merits of policies that hurt them financially in the early stages of implementation. It should be noted that the Government found the Scottish media quite 'fair' in its appraisals in the early 1980s<sup>57</sup>.

As we have seen, socialisation processes in Scotland suggested that those entering the media profession towards the end of the Twentieth Century might have been Labour supporters. However, it seems that the journalists' natural inclinations to the Left were only major factors once Donald Dewar and Labour embarked upon their concerted efforts to discredit the Conservatives in Scotland<sup>58</sup>. This suggests that the proficiency with which the major parties used the media may have been at least as important a factor as the dynamics suggested by the

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01. This point furthers the case being tested in my hypothesis: that the Conservatives may have fared worse in General Elections in Scotland than in England subsequent to heavy Local Government losses.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Lord Fraser, 5.3.01.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

Reinforcement Thesis. Lord Strathclyde was especially keen to note the role of the Scottish media in the downfall of the Conservatives north of the border in this era<sup>59</sup>. The co-operation of the media is essential in the 'POS', whether a party wishes to mount effective opposition or convince the electorate of the benefits of their policies<sup>60</sup>.

Lord Mackay of Clashfern, among others, noted that the Scottish media was always closely monitored to gauge levels of support for the Party and its policies<sup>61</sup>. Therefore, it would seem that the Government would not always have an accurate barometer of the popularity of their 'POMP.' As media analysis was used by the Government to assess the mood of the nation, the Conservative elite in London could not have been receiving an accurate reflection of feelings in Scotland. If anything, the unpopularity of their policies was being overstated<sup>62</sup>. Therefore, they would not have been able to adjust their 'POMP' accurately to what many Scottish voters actually wanted.

Andrew Gamble acknowledged the role of the Scottish media in the Conservatives' downfall<sup>63</sup>. However, as he noted, the traditional pillars of Conservative support north of the border were crumbling already. The political culture generated by these problems suggests that the Scottish media may well have been reinforcing existing sentiments in society north of the

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

<sup>61</sup> Interview, 22.1.01.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>63</sup> Interview, 16.3.00.



border. However, as suggested above, an extra dynamic may have existed, which ensured even more 'POS' success for the Opposition parties through the media in Scotland.

Gamble went on to assert that astute use of the media by Opposition parties in Scotland in particular put even more strain on the Conservatives. These tactics compounded the problems that the Party was already suffering and helped significantly to precipitate the Conservatives' downfall and increase the importance of the media itself<sup>64</sup>. Thus, use of the media by the political parties to promote their own agendas may have influenced the tone of reports, rather than just the forces of the Reinforcement Thesis being at work. Whilst always retaining some credibility, the Reinforcement Thesis has other critics, such as Martin Harrop. He argues that, from the 1980s, the Conservatives and Labour sought to use the media as a more active method of 'selling' and defending new policies to the electorate; key aspects of the 'POS.' One of the main reasons that caused the major parties to do this was because it was felt that modern mass media (television especially) provided an efficient and effective way to influence undecided voters<sup>65</sup>.

The main question to be addressed through the rest of this section, therefore, is who managed to use the media better to relay their messages to the Scottish electorate? The Glasgow University Media Group has given extensive consideration to this question. Their work on the UK as a whole suggests that use of the media by the political parties (rather than the just the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> In: Seaton & Pimlott (eds.), 1987, p53.

media itself) was different in England and Scotland. This may indeed, therefore, have influenced the political culture against the Conservatives north of the border.

John Eldridge asserts that a 'hierarchy of access' to the media exists<sup>66</sup>. Therefore, the Conservatives should have enjoyed optimum coverage from 1979-1997 when they were in office. We have seen how the Conservative elite felt that the Scottish media was biased against it. In England, this did not seem to be such a problem. On further inspection, however, it seems that the actual problem may have lain in Labour's more astute use of the media north of the border. As Greg Philo notes, the Conservatives held (in Bulpitt's terms) such ideological hegemony in prosperous England in the 1980s that Labour were hesitant to put forward their ideas in the media for fear of an adverse reaction<sup>67</sup>. Similarly, Labour did not seem to use the media in England to take any opportunities to criticise Government economic policy. Consequently, their chances of making advances in the 'POS' south of the border were severely diminished. The Conservatives in England, on the other hand, were confident enough to put forward bold statements in the media, knowing that they would be well received in a compliant press that seemed to reflect the mood of the prosperous English nation. Whilst admitting that at least some aspects of the Reinforcement Thesis may still have carried on into the 1980s and 1990s, this analysis places more emphasis on the political parties' attitudes towards, and use of, the media. As we shall see throughout this thesis, a compromise between the Reinforcement Thesis and acknowledgement of more active use of the media is appropriate for an assessment of Local Government and Opposition campaign coverage north of the border.

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<sup>66</sup> Eldridge, John: "News Content, Language & Visuals", London, Routledge, 1995, p289.

In Scotland, it seems that Labour were more confident in putting forward their case to the electorate through the media as they could expect a more sympathetic reception. As we shall see in the case study on Stirling in Chapter 6 of this thesis, Scottish Labour local politicians were very pro-active in their use of the media to criticise central Government policies such as the Poll Tax and promote their own agendas. Even the Conservative Councillors surveyed for the study conceded that Labour was far more astute in their use of the media in Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s.

Labour had a very professional and effective press office in Scotland. The Conservatives needed to emulate this and have a more pro-active attitude towards the use of the media<sup>68</sup>. This is a very important point. On initial examination, it may seem that Scottish newspapers were somewhat inclined towards Labour to safeguard circulation in a political culture that favoured the Left. However, rather than editors, journalists and proprietors necessarily being actively biased, it was often the case that the Opposition were just significantly better at manipulating the media into conveying their messages<sup>69</sup>. Even if a newspaper set out to be impartial, it could still often end up devoting many column inches to the Labour or Nationalist causes due to high profile campaigning by those parties. Especially in the local press, editorial comment and party political news content was minimal compared to the reporting of social and sporting events and advertisements. Thus, a pro-Opposition image might inadvertently become apparent as the Local Government representatives and activists of those parties seemed far keener to take up as much

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<sup>67</sup> Philo, Greg: "Politics, Media & Public Belief", Glasgow, Glasgow University Media Group, 1993, pp6-7.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>69</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

of the available space as possible than their Conservative counterparts. The effects on the local 'POS' in Scotland could not have been good for the Conservatives, as they were finding it very difficult to get their message across in an already hostile environment<sup>70</sup>.

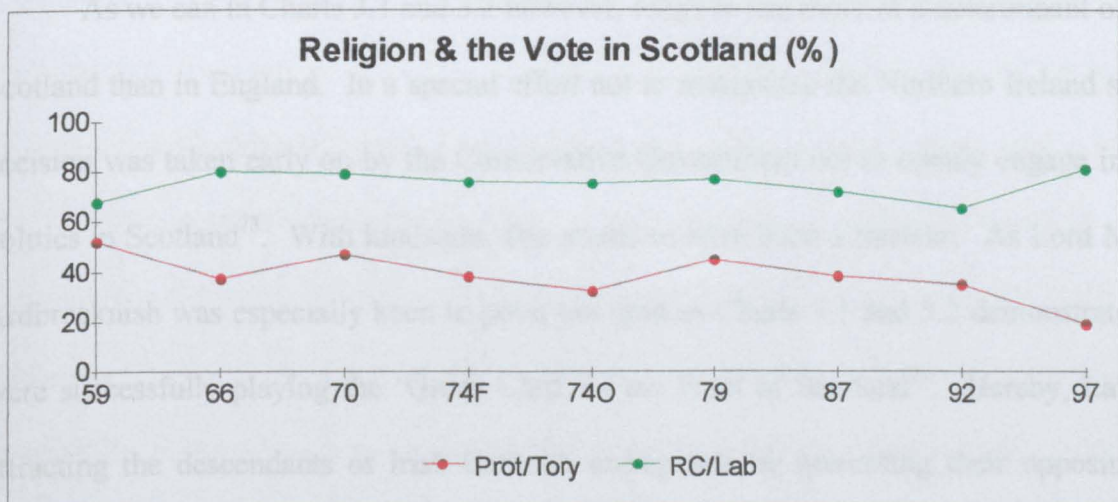
On initial inspection, these assessments of Scottish media coverage of party politics towards the end of the Twentieth Century suggest that the Reinforcement Thesis was still a fairly credible assessment of the relationship between the media and the contemporary political culture. The impression that Labour were more confident and forceful in their media presence in Scotland mirrored their continuing electoral success north of the border. However, it also seems that Labour in Scotland better understood and used the dynamics of modernising Scottish society and media to their best advantage. Indeed there may have been some residual reinforcing aspects in the Scottish media. However, Labour augmented their consequent position of strength with more modern pro-active use of the media. Therefore, it was the astute use of the media by a major party, rather than just the media itself, that had a significant effect on the Scottish political culture and 'POS' towards the end of the Twentieth Century. Another important cultural aspect to Scottish party politics in the Twentieth Century was religion. In this instance, the Conservatives were to suffer from the ever-decreasing strength of the hold of Protestantism in the East of Scotland; something from which they had derived many votes in the past. For the purposes of this chapter, it is nonetheless important to note how other denominations retained their importance within communities, thus preserving the importance of community issues.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid (Con).

## Religion in Scottish Community Life

The Church used to have a strong organisational role in Scottish communities. Nevertheless, there was still a split between the (Anglican) Episcopalian landowners (Tories) and the rest of the nation in the Church of Scotland. Furthermore, the 1980s saw erosion of the Church of Scotland, which damaged working class support for the Conservatives in the urban west and rural areas. Seawright asserts that religious de-alignment was not actually a significant factor in the Conservatives' demise in Scotland<sup>71</sup>. He writes that: "The decline in Conservative support has occurred in those of all religions and of none"<sup>72</sup>. Therefore, one would have expected the Government not to pay too much attention to the phenomenon above any others.

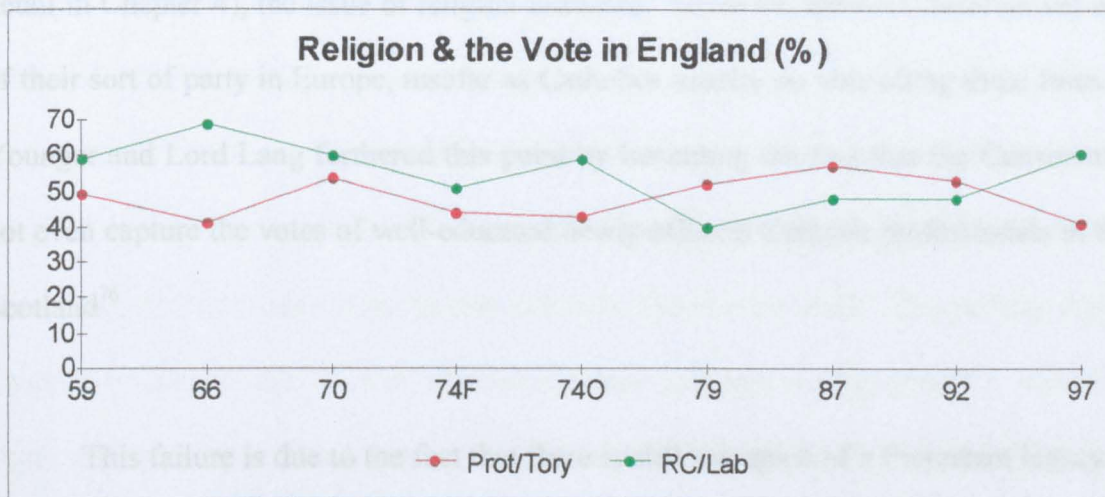


3.1 – Source: Seawright, 1999, pp97-98

<sup>71</sup> Seawright, 1999, p109.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.





3.2 – Source: Seawright, 1999, pp207-208

As we can in Charts 3.1 and 3.2 however, religion was more of a determinant of voting in Scotland than in England. In a special effort not to antagonise the Northern Ireland situation, a decision was taken early on by the Conservative Government not to openly engage in sectarian politics in Scotland<sup>73</sup>. With hindsight, this seems to have been a mistake. As Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish was especially keen to point out (and as Charts 3.1 and 3.2 demonstrate), Labour were successfully playing the ‘Green Card’ in the West of Scotland<sup>74</sup>. Hereby, Labour were attracting the descendants of Irish Catholic immigrants by promoting their opposition to the Conservatives and their Protestant image. Lord Lang noted that Catholics should be natural supporters of the Conservatives, given the Party’s emphasis on traditional values<sup>75</sup>. It is also interesting to note that Labour could attract Catholic voters in Scotland in spite of their abortion policies. This demonstrates how the Conservatives could never be popular with Scottish Catholics because of their Protestant image. As with the nationalism issue (dealt with in more

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Lord Fraser, 5.3.01.

<sup>74</sup> Interview, 25.1.01 & Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

detail in Chapter 4), the issue of religion is another where the British Conservatives are atypical of their sort of party in Europe, insofar as Catholics usually do vote along these lines. Viscount Younger and Lord Lang furthered this point by lamenting the fact that the Conservatives could not even capture the votes of well-educated newly-affluent Catholic professionals in the West of Scotland<sup>76</sup>.

This failure is due to the fact that there is still too much of a Protestant legacy associated with Conservatism in Scotland to facilitate the attraction of these 'natural' supporters. The Party faces a conundrum in this respect. They cannot openly support fundamentalist Protestant movements in Scotland such as the underground 'Jobs for the Bhoys' campaign<sup>77</sup>. Nor can the Conservatives be seen to complain too vociferously about positive discrimination, as was discovered in Monklands District Council during the 1990s. Either of these tactics would leave the Party open to accusations of sectarianism and incite problems in Scotland and, more importantly, Northern Ireland. However, religious de-alignment amongst more moderate Protestants has lost the Conservatives many certain votes<sup>78</sup>. This was especially the case amongst the urban working class; a sector of society that had been impenetrable to the aristocrat-based Conservatives up until their amalgamation with the Liberal Unionists in 1912<sup>79</sup>. The declining importance of religion in the late Twentieth Century was caused by secularisation of modern society in general, and mixed marriages and non-discriminatory employment practices in

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<sup>75</sup> Interview 27.3.01.

<sup>76</sup> Interviews, 14.2.01 & 27.3.01.

<sup>77</sup> This ultra-Orange campaign was against the institution of a Scottish Parliament as they believed that such Devolution was a plot to give more jobs and power to the Irish immigrant Catholic community in Scotland – Interview with Lord Fraser, 5.3.01.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

particular. A Gallup Poll in April 1982, just before the Pope's visit to Britain, which attracted a crowd of 250 000 to Glasgow, reported that as many as 15% of the British population felt that God was not at all important in their lives. Two-thirds of the population acknowledged that religion was losing its influence<sup>80</sup>. In conclusion, we should note that the Conservative Party cannot lay its Protestant image to rest and only loses votes, whilst not gaining any, due to it. There is nothing in the 'POMP' that could arrest religious de-alignment<sup>81</sup>. Nonetheless, it is important to re-iterate that anything that increased the importance of local affairs or threatened Conservative chances at the Local Government level could have damaged their subsequent General Election fortunes by undermining Party Local Government representation and cohesion. Religion had a significant effect in this respect, as can be seen by the way in which Labour local politicians in Scotland played the 'Green Card' heavily in the 1980s and 1990s<sup>82</sup>.

There were no identifiable major religious cleavages in the 1979-1997 period; yet the evidence above suggests that it played some role in the Conservatives' problems. This dynamic was part of a longer continuum beyond the years in question, which confirms its part in many Scots' natural pre-disposition against the Party, which was acquired through processes of socialisation, of both the primacy and recency forms. We have also already mentioned the socialising roles of the Scottish education system and media.

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<sup>79</sup> Graham Walker in: Devine & Finlay (eds.), 1996, p259.

<sup>80</sup> Gallup Political Index, #260 April 1982, p12. By 1989, only 64% replied that they believed in God; this figure had dropped from 68% in 1986 – Gallup Political Index, #352, December 1989, p9.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Andrew Gamble 16.3.00.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.



In order to investigate Scottish political culture and the 'POS' effects of the extra importance of local politics north of the border further, we need to establish in greater detail how the special relationship between Local Government representatives and their electors was most frequently and closely manifested. The issue of Local Authority housing provision fulfils this role most accurately; thus allowing us more insight into the nature of Scottish political culture that seemed to affect the Conservatives 'POS' so severely from 1979-1997.

### ***Local Authority Housing Provision & the 'POS'***

A vital factor to consider with regard to voters' attitudes towards Local Government in Scotland was the higher proportion of Scots who relied on the state for housing<sup>83</sup>. From the end of the War, Labour controlled Local Authorities and the SNP were able to take electoral advantage of the voters' perceptions that the central Government was failing the economic and social needs of Scotland<sup>84</sup>. Due to apparent economic deprivation and poor living conditions, many citizens were eventually moved from areas of urban decay to New Towns in the Central Belt. Local Government initially supplied their new housing<sup>85</sup>. Hence the higher numbers of Local Authority tenants in Scotland than elsewhere in the Union. As the Conservatives came to power in 1979, Scotland had the most Local Authority tenants *per capita* in the 'free world'<sup>86</sup>. If my hypothesis is correct, this key relationship between citizens and Local Government would be of great importance in attempting to explain why a policy such as the 'Right to Buy' (examined

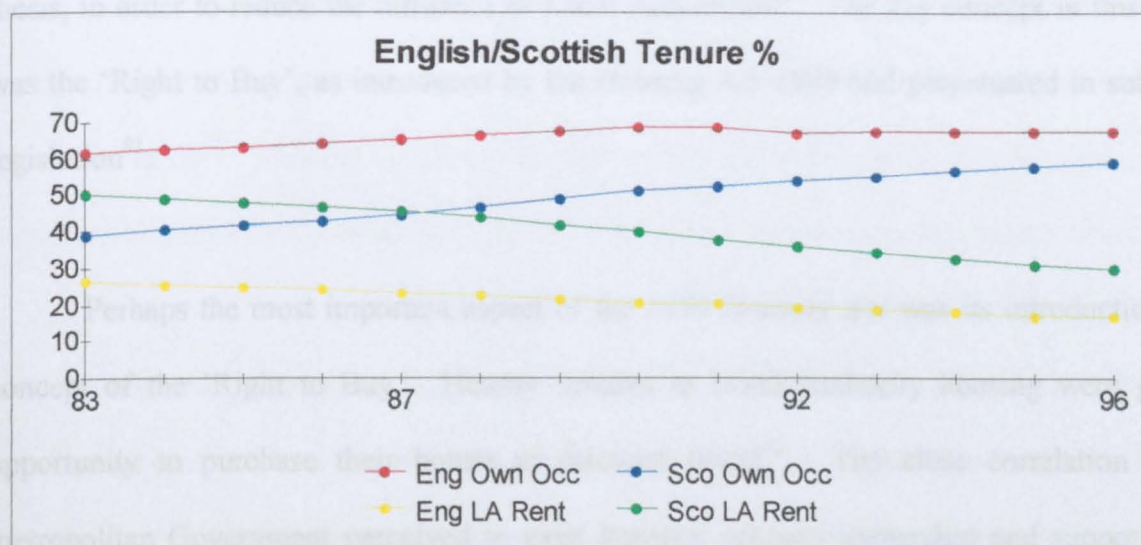
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<sup>83</sup> Mitchell, 1990, p129 + interview with James Mitchell, 8.6.00.

<sup>84</sup> Childs, David: "Britain Since 1945 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.", London, Routledge, 1992, p269. Contested by Robert Blake with regard to the housing issue. He argues that the Party was particularly accommodating towards society's need for new house building – Blake, Robert: "The Conservative Party – From Peel to Major", London, Arrow, 1998, p268.

<sup>85</sup> Bradbury, 1997, p76.

in greater depth, below) might have been met with different electoral reactions north of the border<sup>87</sup>. Another important point to consider is whether Mrs Thatcher over-estimated the ability of Scots to live without the state intervention that they had become so used to<sup>88</sup>?



3.3 – Sources: *Housing & Construction Statistics, Annuals 1981-1991, p114*  
*1987-1997, p123*

LEGEND: LA Rent = Rented from Local Authority; Own Occ = Owner Occupied.

As can be seen from Chart 3.3 to this chapter, when the Conservatives came to power in 1979, renting housing from Local Authorities was most prevalent in Scotland. The main ‘POS’ implication of this was centred on the idea that Local Councils could engineer electoral support

<sup>86</sup> *Regional Trends*, Number 20, 1985, p61 & *The Daily Telegraph*, 10.5.79, p18.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with David McLetchie, 19.1.01.

<sup>88</sup> Charmley, John: “*A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996*”, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996, p236 + Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

for themselves *and their party in General Elections* by keeping rents low<sup>89</sup>. Therefore, one of the major emphases of Conservative housing policy in the 1980s was to lure voters out of public sector housing. The central Government took this decision for the twin reasons that they believed property owners to be more likely to vote Conservative and, very importantly for this thesis, in order to reduce the influence of Local Authorities<sup>90</sup>. The key concept in this strategy was the 'Right to Buy', as introduced by the *Housing Act 1980* and perpetuated in subsequent legislation<sup>91</sup>.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the *1980 Housing Act* was its introduction of the concept of the 'Right to Buy.' Hereby, tenants in Local Authority housing were given an opportunity to purchase their homes at discount prices<sup>92</sup>. The close correlation that the metropolitan Government perceived to exist between property-ownership and support for the Conservative Party was the reason behind this aspect of the legislation<sup>93</sup>. The Prime Minister was attempting to mould social structures and attitudes to suit her ideas<sup>94</sup>. She wanted a more entrepreneurial spirit in society that would encourage citizens to secure their own welfare through their own efforts. This may well have been borne out of a genuine neoliberal desire to

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<sup>89</sup> Interviews with Lords Strathclyde, 8.11.00 & Sanderson, 30.11.00 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01 + Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01 & Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>91</sup> A brief synopsis of subsequent 'Right to Buy' legislation is presented in Appendix A to this chapter. The following notational abbreviations will be used throughout descriptions of legislation: [Part - Chapter - Section - Subsection - Paragraph] (where all are necessary).

<sup>92</sup> Long leases on flats, freeholds on houses [I, I, 1 (1) (a)].

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01. The accuracy of this perception is somewhat questionable with regard to Scotland, as demonstrated by Chart 3.5.

<sup>94</sup> Anthony Heath & Geoff Garrett in: Denver, David & Hands, Gordon (eds.): "Issues & Controversies in British Electoral Behaviour", London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, p355.

minimise state interference in the lives of citizens. However, the inherent tax cuts would also have made the policies of privatisation and property-ownership extension attractive. The hope was that citizens who benefited financially from the extension of the property market would reward the Conservatives with their votes. Furthermore, the newly propertied class would also look to punish Labour at the polls for being so restrictive<sup>95</sup>. Heath and Garrett assert that existing owner-occupiers were always likely to vote Conservative because of their socio-economic status<sup>96</sup>. The big challenge for the Conservatives would be to make sure that new owners would associate their recent apparent good fortune with the Party, and vote accordingly.

Given the geographical focus of this thesis, the *Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980* is of much interest. It appeared almost in parallel to the groundbreaking *Housing Act*. Therefore, its contents should disclose whether the Government was prepared to make special considerations for the Scottish housing situation. The main point to look out for is whether the much higher incidence of Local Authority renting in Scotland was taken into account. I, I, 1 (1) of this Act confirmed that the 'Right to Buy' scheme is to be extended to Scotland. Thus, the Government's twin desires of extending property ownership and exerting more control over Local Government were not stopping at the border. Indeed, special provision was made for Scottish circumstances to promote the scheme even further than in England. For example, extra discounts on market prices of residences were to be given after only three years tenancy, as opposed to four in England [*Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980*, I, I, 1 (5) (a-b)]. This

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<sup>95</sup> This theme was still being continued in the 1987 Party manifesto – in: Dale, Iain (ed.): “Conservative Party General Election Manifestos 1900-1997”, London, Routledge, 2000, p317.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p356 + interviews with David McLetchie, 19.1.01 & Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

demonstrated that the central Government seemed to be aware of the special housing circumstances in Scotland. The special enthusiasm to extend 'Right to Buy' to Scotland shows how they wished to court the large number of potential voters in Local Authority housing and diminish the influence of the landlord Councils north of the border.

Part XII of the Act further confirmed the Government's desire to expand the property-owning classes in Scotland<sup>97</sup>. Not only was property ownership seen as a way of increasing the prosperity of voters, it was also hoped that it would increase their stake in society<sup>98</sup>. Thus, the central Government would have to spend less on renovation. XII, I, 214 (1) permitted Local Authorities to advance money to citizens who wish to acquire, build, improve or repair houses. Money from this scheme was also to be made available to those who were taking advantage of 'Right to Buy' [X, I, 216 (1)]. XII, I, 222 (1) extended the Secretary of State's powers to advance money to lending institutions, including banks, building societies, the Scottish Special Housing Authority and Local Authorities, so that they could give more attractive terms to prospective first-time buyers. Finally, the Act re-iterated the Government's commitment to improving the quality of housing stock and, therefore, its value by empowering Local Authorities and the Secretary of State to make improvement grants for defective properties [XIII, I, 236 (2) and XIII, I, 257 (1)]. Thus, right from the beginning of the 'Right to Buy' programme, Scotland was to be included as much as anywhere else in the UK. The apparent enhanced role of Local Government there suggests that if Scottish Local Authorities, both Conservative and Labour,

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<sup>97</sup> "Conservatives aim to extend as widely as possible the opportunity to own property and build up capital... and develop economic independence and security", 1987 Party manifesto – in: Dale (ed.), 2000, p316.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p317.

were to have any 'POS' victories by their handling of a metropolitan policy, then housing provision and the 'Right to Buy' was it.

There are many parts of the *Housing Act 1985* that continued to promote the Government's programme of selling Council Houses. IV, I, 100 (1) of this Act permitted Local Authorities to re-imburse tenants for any improvements that they may have made to their dwellings. Thus, tenants were encouraged to keep their homes in good order, thereby raising the market value of the property. Furthermore, the central Government could also direct where more Local Authority money was to be spent. As we can see from the above and Appendix A to this chapter, the Conservatives pressed ahead with the 'Right to Buy' with great conviction. We have seen what the Conservative elite hoped to achieve by their housing policies in the 1980s. It now remains to be seen what sort of effect the 'Right to Buy' had on the electorate and Local Government in Scotland. As we shall see, the policy seemed to have the desired effect at the polls in England. However, quite the opposite seemed to occur north of the border. A summary and assessment of the possible explanations for this 'POS' discrepancy follows.

Butler and Kavanagh note four characteristics that were changing in British society between 1979 and 1987 that should have steered the electorate firmly towards the Conservatives<sup>99</sup>. Home ownership had risen from 52% to 66%. Share ownership went up from 7% to 19%. The number of people renting their homes from Local Authorities had fallen from 45% to 27%. Trade Union membership had fallen from 30% to 22%. All these traits were compatible with New Right Conservatism, and should have won the Party many new supporters.

Such a swing to the Party did occur in England. However, quite the opposite was the case in Scotland. Firstly, with regard to housing, therefore, the question of who was taking advantage of 'Right to Buy' north and south of the border must be addressed. Any differences between the new homeowners in England and Scotland might reveal why those north of the border were less likely to re-align themselves with the Conservatives.

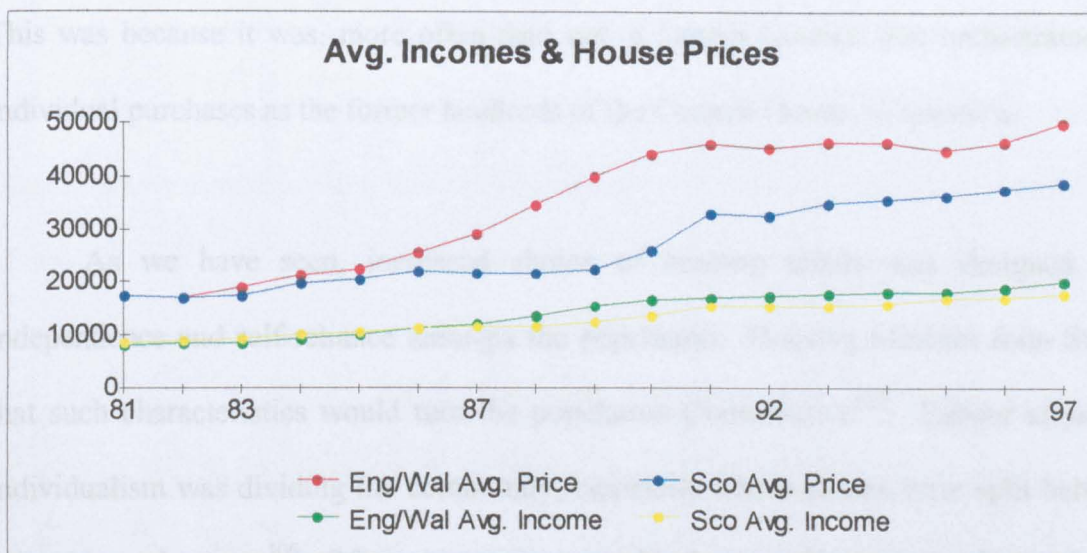
Most instructive in a comparison of first-time property buyers around the various British regions is an analysis of their average annual incomes and house prices. Comparative figures for all the parts of the United Kingdom are presented in Chart 3.4. The chart shows what kind of people (by income) were buying their Council Houses in which areas (demonstrated by the average house prices). Whilst house prices may have varied, it is vital to note that the Scottish income plots mirror closely those of the England<sup>100</sup>. Therefore, it is fair to say that, using this descriptive variable, the same sorts of voters were entering the property market north and south of the border as a result of the Conservatives' 'Right to Buy' policies. Thus, there must have been extra difficulty for the Conservatives in persuading these potential supporters for the Party in Scotland to re-align.

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<sup>99</sup> Butler & Kavanagh, 1988, p4.

<sup>100</sup> The correlation would have been even closer had it not been for the inflated house prices and wages in the London area.





3.4 – Sources: *Housing & Construction Statistics Annuals*, 1981-1991, pp143-147  
1987-1997, pp153-157.

Another key divide in the housing issue in Scotland is that between urban and rural. This polarisation was very keenly felt in 1979<sup>101</sup>. The major effect of this on the question in hand concerns which sorts of voters were going to take advantage of ‘Right to Buy?’ From the outset, it was unlikely that there would be too many takers for the scheme in rural, more Conservative parts of Scotland, given that the majority of Local Authority housing is in urban areas. These areas are Labour strongholds traditionally, as many Catholic immigrant communities had clustered there<sup>102</sup>. In such districts, credible socialist activists, especially including those in office in Local Government, could dissuade all but the most insistent purchasers<sup>103</sup>. If sales did go through in these areas, Labour Councillors were able to take the credit from grateful

<sup>101</sup> Jenkins, Peter: “*Mrs Thatcher’s Revolution - the Ending of the Socialist Era*”, London, Jonathan Cope, 1987, p95.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.



purchasers, even though it was ultimately a Conservative policy that facilitated the change<sup>104</sup>. This was because it was, more often than not, a Labour Council that orchestrated deals over individual purchases as the former landlords of the Council Houses in question.

As we have seen, increased choice of housing tenure was designed to promote independence and self-reliance amongst the population. Housing Minister John Stanley hoped that such characteristics would turn the population Conservative<sup>105</sup>. Labour argued that such individualism was dividing the community, especially where estates were split between owner-occupiers and tenants<sup>106</sup>. Of great importance to this thesis is the point that Butler and Kavanagh report about this issue in the 1979 General Election campaign<sup>107</sup>. They note how Conservative canvassers were well received on English Council Estates for the first time as they carried their message of 'Right to Buy.' On the other hand, Scottish Conservative candidates for Local Government and General Elections were still usually met with open hostility on such estates throughout the 1980s and 1990s<sup>108</sup>.

With regard to the 'POS' effect of housing tenure question, Seawright asserts that, from the mid-1970s onwards, tenure was a much more politicised issue in Scotland than in England<sup>109</sup>. Dickson agrees with Seawright's assessment. He asserts that the housing issue became increasingly politicised by levels of state intervention in individuals' lives. Furthermore, direct

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with David McCletchie, 19.1.01.

<sup>105</sup> Riddell, Peter: "The Thatcher Government", Oxford, Blackwell, 1985, p155.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p156.

<sup>107</sup> Butler & Kavanagh, 1980, p190.

<sup>108</sup> Interviews with Ross Harper, 6.8.01 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01 + Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

contact with the state (as in Local Authority housing provision) is either desired by voters on the left or derided as being too interventionist by neoliberal Conservatives<sup>110</sup>. North of the border, Labour were using Local Authority housing to keep supporters through low rents whilst the Conservatives were unveiling their 'Right to Buy' plans, with all the inherent benefits and costs of property ownership<sup>111</sup>. The Conservative elite had to persuade the Scottish voters that property ownership was indeed desirable and that it was the policies of the central Government that was making access to the market easier<sup>112</sup>. Given the entrenched nature of much of Local Government and the persuasiveness of Labour activists in it in Scotland during the 1980s, getting these messages across was never going to be easy<sup>113</sup>. This point gives support to the hypothesis that the Conservatives suffered significantly from poor Local Government representation in Scotland.

As Gerry Stoker notes, the sale of Council Houses was perhaps the biggest success of the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s in the UK as a whole<sup>114</sup>. The major problem, therefore, was not in the policy, but its delivery and explanation to the electorate in Scotland. We are seeing that the role of Local Authorities in Scotland in this process is substantial. This role was played out through Conservative Councillors serving to defend and 'sell' policies at a local level and their opponents seeking to disrupt or take the electoral credit through their

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<sup>109</sup> Seawright, 1999, p62.

<sup>110</sup> In: McCrone, David; Kendrick, Stephen & Straw, Pat (eds.): "The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture & Social Change", Edinburgh, British Sociological Association, 1989, p79.

<sup>111</sup> Interviews with Lords Strathclyde, 8.11.00 & Sanderson, 30.11.00 + David McLetchie, 19.1.01.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with David McLetchie, 19.1.01.

implementation and spending schemes. It is becoming apparent that these Local Councillor roles are essential in the 'POMP' and 'POS' in Scotland, but are usually under-assessed<sup>115</sup>. Lord Lang admitted how the Conservatives in London had not given enough consideration to this dynamic when they were in office<sup>116</sup>. The importance of this issue becomes particularly relevant when assessing the conundrum of why the Conservatives could not reap the electoral benefits of policies in Scotland that won them many votes south of the border.

The 'Right to Buy' was perhaps the policy where Local Government was most required to 'sell' a central initiative to their constituents, given the intrinsic role of Local Authorities in the scheme. It should also be noted that the genesis of the policy came from Francis Griffin, a Conservative in Local Government in Birmingham; thus demonstrating how the Conservative elite in London was also reliant on subsidiary levels for informing and helping them with local issues<sup>117</sup>. These two aspects of the relationship between central and Local Government suggest that the elite in London should have been keen to strengthen their party's representation at the local level by formulating policies for which the electorate would reward Conservative candidates at all levels. Furthermore, Local Government under Opposition control might have been ameliorated for fear of inducing concerted efforts to undermine the 'POMP', and thereby the Conservatives' 'POS.'

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<sup>114</sup> Stoker, Gerry: *Intergovernmental Relations*, in: Public Administration, 73, 1995, pp101-122, p104.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>116</sup> Interview, 27.3.01.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

Indeed, Labour were able to capitalise on the 'Right to Buy' scheme. Tenants who were purchasing their homes often believed the scheme to actually be a Labour initiative. Most of the legal and financial details of a purchase would be handled by the Local Council involved, rather than by the central Government. Thus, Labour were able to benefit from increased contact with grateful voters<sup>118</sup>. Conservative housing policies impacted more on Labour Local Authorities in Scotland than Councils of any party anywhere else, due to the higher proportions of Council tenants there. Therefore, there was a different reaction to that south of the border<sup>119</sup>. Labour Councils, seeing their housing subsidies waning, mounted a 'Luddite' campaign against the policies<sup>120</sup>. An adverse reaction towards their local Labour Councillors may have been expected from the electorate, given that citizens may have wished to benefit from the opportunity to own property and pay less for local services. However, even though Labour Councils were often going as far as cancelling 'Right to Buy' deals, they still had enough political credibility amongst the electorate to remain in power<sup>121</sup>. This is a very good example of Local Government in Scotland posing a particular 'POS' problem for the Conservative Government.

South of the border, the Prime Minister was happy that the ever extending 'Right to Buy' scheme was becoming so popular with citizens that Labour Local Authorities could no longer oppose it<sup>122</sup>. Even though Council Houses were being bought up at an impressive rate in Scotland, however, Labour politicians and activists there were still able to convince voters not to

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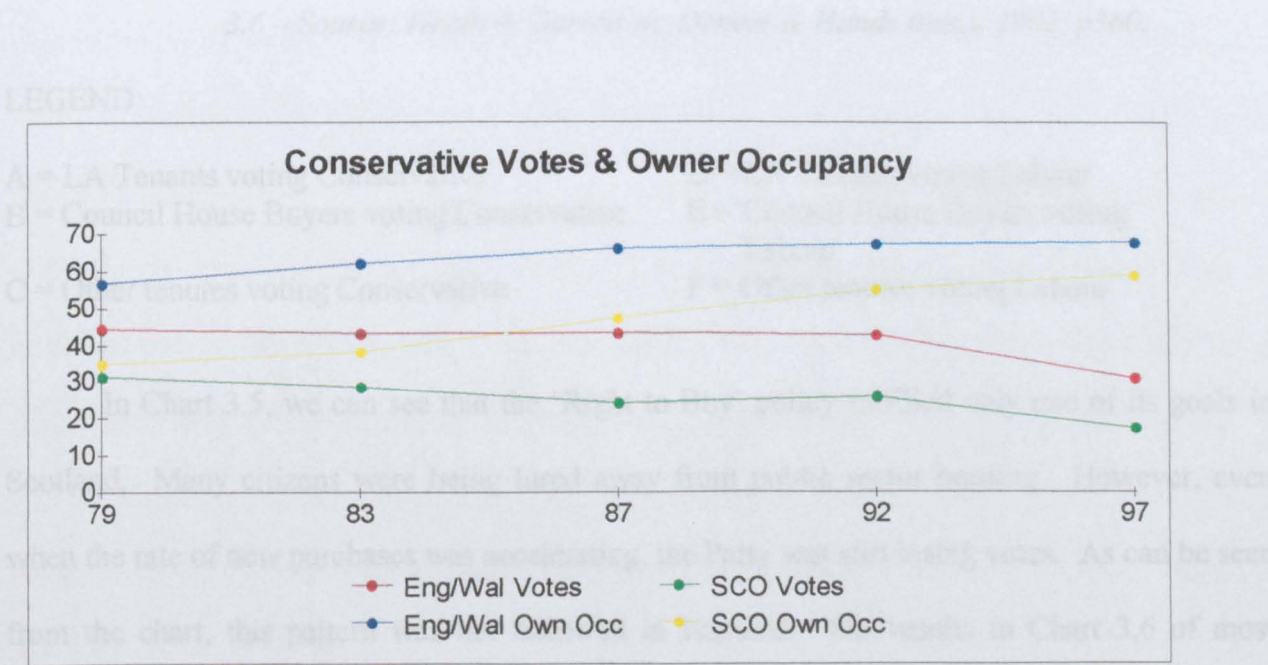
<sup>118</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01 + Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>119</sup> Bonefeld, Werner; Brown, Alice & Burnham, Peter: "A Major Crisis? The Politics of Economic Policy in Britain in the 1990s", Aldershot, Dartmouth, 1995, p144.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>121</sup> Interviews with David McLetchie, 19.1.01 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 + Butler & Kavanagh, 1984, p63.

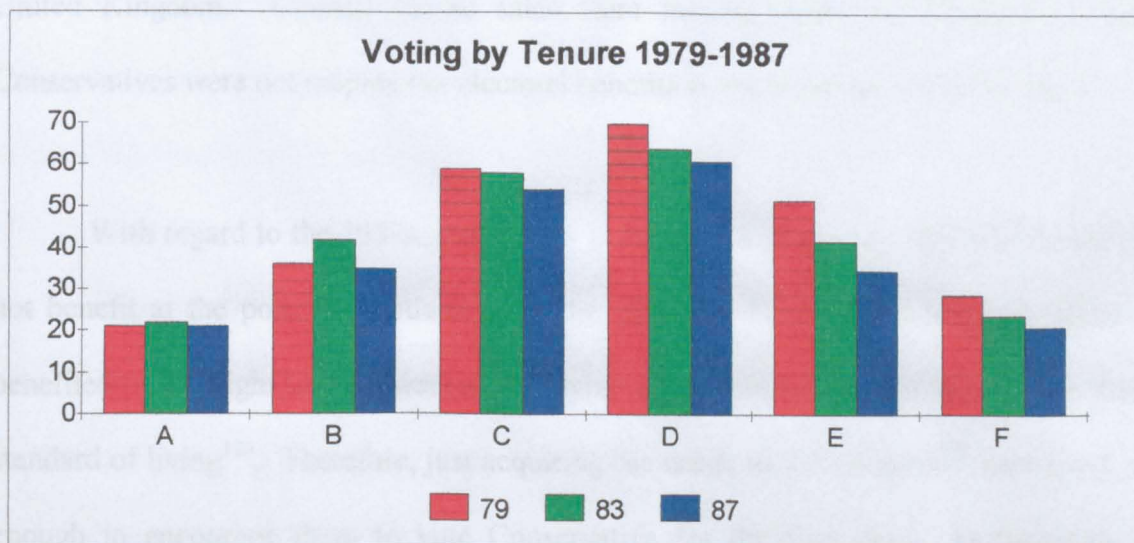
support the Conservatives as a consequence. Thus, the Conservatives were going to find it very difficult to capitalise on the housing initiatives, as they had done south of the border. The two main problems were to convince the voters to make the link between any improved living conditions that property ownership may have brought and the Conservative Government in London; and to circumvent Labour Local Authority opposition<sup>123</sup>. This was not the first example of this ‘low politics’ issue of housing and Local Authority rents having a significant impact on the Conservatives’ UK-wide ‘POS.’ For example, Butler and King note how the question formed an important part of the 1966 General Election campaign<sup>124</sup>.



3.5 – Sources: Butler & Kavanagh: “The British General Election of...”<sup>125</sup>, and *Housing & Construction Statistics, Annuals 1981-1991*, p114 1987-1997, p123.

<sup>122</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p279.  
<sup>123</sup> Interviews with David McLetchie, 19.1.01, Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01 + Written Statement by Sir Malcolm Rifkind, 22.1.01.  
<sup>124</sup> Butler, D. E. & King, Anthony: “The British General Election of 1966”, London, Macmillan, 1966, p200.  
<sup>125</sup> 1979, p356; 1983, p301; 1987, p284; 1992, p286; 1997, p256.





3.6 – Source: Heath & Garrett in: *Denver & Hands (eds.)*, 1992, p360.

#### LEGEND:

A = LA Tenants voting Conservative

B = Council House Buyers voting Conservative

C = Other tenures voting Conservative

D = LA Tenants voting Labour

E = Council House Buyers voting Labour

F = Other tenures voting Labour

In Chart 3.5, we can see that the ‘Right to Buy’ policy fulfilled only one of its goals in Scotland. Many citizens were being lured away from public sector housing. However, even when the rate of new purchases was accelerating, the Party was still losing votes. As can be seen from the chart, this pattern was not followed in England. The results in Chart 3.6 of most interest to the Conservatives with regard to the effectiveness of their housing policies would have been in columns B, D and E. B shows the desired effect of luring Council House buyers to the Party. Nevertheless, this was not happening in the numbers they hoped for and there was a disappointing fall in 1987. D and E decrease nicely through the 1980s. The steady decrease in D, E and F show how much the Labour Party had to worry about, as it was losing support in all tenure areas. It must be remembered, however, that these figures relate to the whole of the

United Kingdom. Council House sales were moving apace in Scotland as well. The Conservatives were not reaping the electoral benefits in the same way as in England.

With regard to the 1980s, there seem to be two main reasons why the Conservatives did not benefit at the polls in Scotland from the 'Right to Buy.' Most Scottish voters who had benefited from 'Right to Buy' were not enjoying significant concurrent increases in their general standard of living<sup>126</sup>. Therefore, just acquiring the deeds to their houses<sup>127</sup> would not have been enough to encourage them to vote Conservative for the first time. Furthermore, as Local Councillors in Scotland could wield significant influence on their constituents, Labour groups in Local Authorities were able to deflect due praise and electoral reward from a seemingly well-designed piece of 'POMP.' One of the most astute ways in which they managed this was to highlight the poor quality of Local Authority housing stock that was left. Rather than be criticised for no longer being able to provide good quality housing, Opposition-controlled Local Authorities were able to blame the metropolitan Government and, thus, absolve themselves. It will be interesting to note in subsequent chapters whether such manipulation was possible in policy areas that did not involve Local Authorities as much as the selling off of Council Houses?

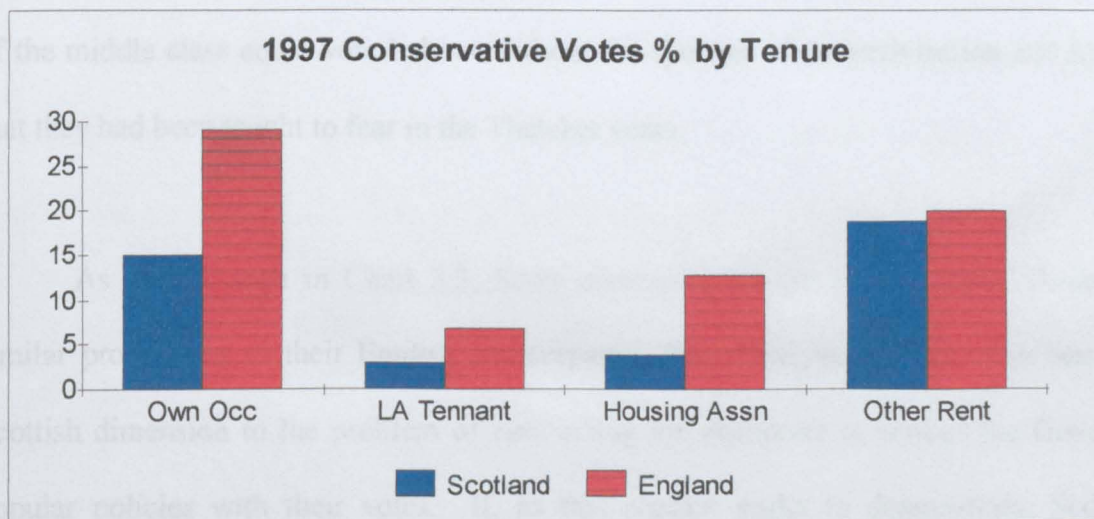
With regard to housing, John Major had more success with a more traditional Conservative 'statecraft' approach<sup>128</sup>. However, this is not to say that all Thatcherite policies had been jettisoned. An aspect of Thatcherite practice perpetuated by the new Prime Minister

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<sup>126</sup> Interview with David McLetchie, 19.1.01.

<sup>127</sup> An act that often burdened voters with the extra expense of house repairs for the first time. This was particularly difficult to accept for Scots who had been brought up in a culture of expecting maintenance from their Local Authorities – Ibid.

was to use Scotland as a testing ground for new schemes. For example, ‘gro-grants’, which gave private developers access to Government grants to build affordable homes, were implemented north of the border before their introduction in England and Wales in 1996<sup>129</sup>. Just before the 1997 Election, Seldon asserts that the Prime Minister was still looking to widen the ‘Right to Buy’ scheme<sup>130</sup>. The Party tried to soften the message by saying that £6bn had been spent so far through Housing Association renting projects<sup>131</sup>. However, this message did not get away from the fact that Local Authority housing was still being run down in favour of private ownership. This was not well advised. ‘Right to Buy’ was decreasing in popularity from the mid-1980s in all regions as purchasers were being trapped by negative equity and older tenants were finding that they could never realise their assets<sup>132</sup>.



3.7 – Source: Brown *et al*, 1999<sup>133</sup>.

<sup>128</sup> Bradbury, 1997, p81.

<sup>129</sup> Lund, Brian (ed.): “Housing Problems and Housing Policy”, London, Longman, 1996, p58.

<sup>130</sup> Seldon, 1998, p543.

<sup>131</sup> 1997 manifesto, in: Dale (ed.), 2000, p428.

<sup>132</sup> Christine Whitehead in: Cook, Philip & Crook, Tony: “Low Cost Home Ownership. An Evaluation of Housing Policy Under the Conservatives”, Aldershot, Gower, 1986, p74.

<sup>133</sup> Brown, Alice; McCrone, David; Paterson, Lindsay & Surridge, Paula: “The Scottish Electorate – The 1997 General Election and Beyond”, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999, p55.



The figures in Chart 3.7 best illustrate the apparent failure of extending home ownership in the hope of attracting more voters north of the border. By 1997, we can see that not only did Scottish owner-occupiers not vote Conservative in as great a proportion as their English counterparts, but also that they did not even make up the largest proportion of the meagre Conservative vote there. This was despite the fact that, during the period 1995-1997, the economy and house prices were starting to recover<sup>134</sup>. Butler and Kavanagh note how house prices were rising by between 15% and 30% and how unemployment was falling<sup>135</sup>. However, the Conservatives still fared badly in the 1997 election. Butler and Kavanagh conclude that this was not because voters were so disaffected with Conservative capitalism that they were de-aligning and seeking a true alternative. Instead, the New Labour Party under Tony Blair had come so close to the Conservatives' position on economic matters that owner-occupier members of the middle class could vote Labour without the spectres of collectivisation and high taxation that they had been taught to fear in the Thatcher years.

As can be seen in Chart 3.3, Scots eventually bought their Council Houses in fairly similar proportions to their English counterparts. Therefore, there must have been an added Scottish dimension to the problem of convincing the electorate to reward the Government for popular policies with their votes. If, as this chapter seeks to demonstrate, Scottish Local Government representatives play an enhanced role in their communities, then this variable assumes great explanatory significance. In subsequent chapters, we shall learn of a general antipathy towards the Conservatives in Scotland, which was caused by a combination of

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<sup>134</sup> Butler & Kavanagh, 1997, p303.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

historical and structural factors and ill-advised contemporary policies<sup>136</sup>. If this long-standing electoral handicap is added to the apparent extra effectiveness of astute Labour Councillors in Scotland, any particular metropolitan Conservative policy would have had to have been of almost miraculous quality to win over significant numbers of voters there<sup>137</sup>.

The next section of this chapter seeks to find more examples of local politicians in Scotland successfully attacking or defending the 'POMP.' Thus, we will be able to further assess whether they could play a significant role in the 'POS' beyond the housing issue, which fell directly under their remit.

### ***Scottish Local Politics & the 'POMP'***

At this point, it is important to differentiate between the two 'strands' of work undertaken by Local Councillors<sup>138</sup>. Many times, citizens will be very grateful to their Councillor for help with a specific small-scale civic issue such as the repair of a street light. However, in this instance, no connection is made between the Councillor's action and the national competence of their party. The more important 'POS' work undertaken by Local Councillors is when they are acting very openly on behalf of their party in a district-wide issue. Examples of such actions in Scotland, which were capable of changing voters' attitudes towards a party, were where Councillors championed the interests of their wards, School Boards or Tenants' Association. Furthermore, Councillors could join national campaigns and, thus, increase their party's profile

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.1.01.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

amongst the local community. Examples of such high profile national campaigns that Labour Councillors joined included the Miners' Strike, Poll Tax, healthcare and anti-privatisation issues.

The prime example of Scottish Local Authorities seeking to completely undermine a metropolitan Government policy was the concerted opposition towards the Poll Tax<sup>139</sup>. It is most interesting to note that dissent was even heard from Conservative Councillors. Actions taken from that quarter are examined later in this chapter. At this point, the way in which Opposition parties in Local Government sought to disrupt the Conservatives' 'POS' in Scotland over this issue will be examined. Almost as soon as the policy had been implemented, a non-payment campaign began. Labour and SNP local politicians endorsed this campaign especially<sup>140</sup>. It should be noted that there was some disagreement within these parties as to how far such measures should be taken<sup>141</sup>. However, even in areas where most of the tax was collected<sup>142</sup>, Local Government representatives of all parties complained bitterly about this piece of 'POMP.' If my hypothesis is proved, such antagonism caused in Local Government by the 'POMP' north of the border was severely damaging to the central Government's 'POS.'

Amongst Labour and SNP local politicians, the most frequent condemnations of the Poll Tax were that it was inequitable and forced them to cut local services due to budgeting

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<sup>139</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 & Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002. This issue is referred to again in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

<sup>140</sup> Times, 7.1.89, p5. Prominent figures such as the Lord Provost of Edinburgh and the leader of Lothian District Council faced legal action for their refusal to pay – Times, 16.3.90, p1 & Glasgow Herald, 1.9.89, p8.

<sup>141</sup> Glasgow Herald, 2.3.90, p5 & 20.3.90, p1.

<sup>142</sup> Most frequently in rural regions – Times, 21.9.89, p5.

restrictions<sup>143</sup>. Such arguments were countered by the Conservative elite and their representatives in Scotland with an exhortation for more responsible budgeting practices in Local Government<sup>144</sup>. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the Thatcher administration was trying to win support by cutting voters' tax bills and introducing more accountable Local Authority service provision. The Poll Tax and concurrent Local Government finance measures (to be detailed in Chapters 4 and 5) caused the most friction in Local Government in Scotland<sup>145</sup>. Beyond their statutory obligation to implement the policies, however, the question remained as to what these Local Authorities could do to damage the Conservatives' 'POS?'

Teachers, nurses and higher education staff and students were all highly vociferous opponents of the policy. Many of these citizens enjoyed substantial rebates. Nevertheless, it also seemed that their Local Authorities were not chasing them very hard<sup>146</sup>. At this time, registration for the new tax was taking place in England and Wales<sup>147</sup>. The metropolitan Government was pleased to report high rates of returns for this exercise. However, it was estimated that 30-40% of Glaswegians were not paying their Poll Tax<sup>148</sup>. Even though they were under statutory obligation to collect the tax, many Local Authorities in Scotland were slow to do so<sup>149</sup>, thus disrupting the levels of revenue generated. Consequently, central Government subsidies would have to be re-evaluated. Such re-evaluations would often lead to tax increases

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<sup>143</sup> Interviews with Lords Sanderson, 30.11.00 and MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 + Stirling News, 7.5.92, p1 & 2.3.95, p1 + Scotsman, 7.4.95, p4

<sup>144</sup> Ibid (2 interviewees + 3 newspaper articles).

<sup>145</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>146</sup> Times Educational Scottish Supplement, 20.1.89, p3, Times Higher Education Supplement, 17.3.89, p5 + Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>147</sup> Glasgow Herald, 1.9.89, p8 & Times, 21.9.89, p5.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid (2 newspaper articles).

and service cuts in Scotland. Thereafter, the central and Local Governments would vie to convince the voters of who was to blame; with the Conservatives in London blaming non-payment and inefficiency, whilst Opposition parties were attacking an inequitable taxation/subsidy system being imposed by an absentee Government that had no mandate north of the border<sup>150</sup>. In later chapters, we shall see in more detail how the Conservatives suffered from a traditional bias against them in Scotland<sup>151</sup>. It seems that this accumulation of antipathy led to Labour arguments regarding the Poll Tax being more readily accepted north of the border than the Conservatives' point of view.

In addition to supporting non-payment campaigns, Labour Local Authorities took advantage of the Conservatives' traditional Scottish handicap to further their cause in the 'POS' with measures that were legal, but clearly designed to undermine the central Government and alienate Scottish potential Conservative supporters from the Thatcherite creed. An example of such a measure was when Labour Councils used their multiplier powers to charge providers of holiday accommodation (usually Conservatives) Poll Tax on both their residential and 'business' properties<sup>152</sup>. Whilst these Conservative tax-payers would see that this extra burden had been imposed by Labour Councillors, it was possible for Opposition parties to trace the root of the problem back to the Conservative elite in London for imposing the Poll Tax in the first instance. Another example of such defiance by a Scottish Local Authority came in 1992 when

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>150</sup> For example: Glasgow Herald, 1.3.90, p12. Further examples of this debate appear in this thesis' study of Local Government in Stirling.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>152</sup> Glasgow Herald, 2.9.89, p8.

Clackmannanshire, by virtue of some clever accounting, managed to circumvent subsidy cuts<sup>153</sup>. By approving the Authority's budget early, they were able to exclude £108k, thereby remaining eligible for central help.

To date, this chapter has sought to discover incidents and characteristics of Scottish society that rendered Local Government there quite influential. The first of these circumstances was the Conservatives' questionable mandate to govern in Scotland. No matter how empathetic Scottish Conservative local politicians were with their fellow-Scots, they still had to try to defend and promote policies made by the distant/'foreign' Government in London. Next, a well co-ordinated network of Labour Local Councillors in Scotland troubled the Conservatives<sup>154</sup>. These Councillors, who controlled many more Local Authorities than their counterparts south of the border, were astute enough to manipulate their constituents into believing that even the Conservatives most populist policies were not in the Scots' best interests<sup>155</sup>. Unlike Labour, Conservative Councils in Scotland had no intra-party mutual support network across the nation<sup>156</sup>. Therefore, it was difficult to muster help for the implementation or defence of the 'POMP', as well as to run effective election campaigns. The Conservatives' 'POS' was suffering in Scotland due to traditional antipathy from the electorate and astute planning by Opposition parties in Local Government. Importantly for this chapter, it seems that the structure of society and political culture in Scotland rendered local issues and Councillors sufficiently

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<sup>153</sup> Stirling Observer, 24.1.92, p1.

<sup>154</sup> Interviews with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01 – nor did the Conservatives feel comfortable in using the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities as an agency for co-ordination, as was the case for

important to facilitate these exchanges in the 'POS.' The next section of this chapter examines how the Party elite in London liaised with its lieutenants north of the border in an attempt to rectify the situation.

### ***The Influence of (Scottish) Conservative Grass Roots Activists on the 'POS' & 'POMP'***

“(A) party which allows its grass roots to wither and decline is likely to run into serious electoral problems... particularly if rival parties are building up their local organizations [sic] at the same time”<sup>157</sup>.

This quote suggests that there is scope for assessment in this area of the Conservative Party away from London. Andrew Gamble's notion of the 'POS' highlights the importance of local organisation; even if he does not give too much consideration to regional variations. He equates the 'POS' with a market place, with the Government playing the role of producers through the 'POMP' with the electorate as the consumers who are usually passive, except at election time. There are certain rules that the Government must follow insofar as they have to supply policies that will satisfy enough of the voters to ensure re-election. It should be noted that metropolitan Governments, in the language of Gamble's model, must also react, instead of just dictating, to the needs and desires of their own Party members. These members play important dual roles, especially in territories far from London. They are required not only for successful marshalling of support at General Election times, but also for help with selling new policies in their constituencies.

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Labour Local Government representatives – Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

Gamble was keen to consider the dynamic that the central Party should ascribe to strict rules of engagement with its own members, as well as the electorate at large<sup>158</sup>. Following this code, that is to say, supplying policies and instructions that can be easily accepted and supported by local members, is essential if these grass roots members are to keep performing their essential 'POS' tasks willingly and effectively. Gamble claims that the general electorate is usually fairly passive, reserving their power for the ballot box<sup>159</sup>. By their very nature and continuous 'POS' role, Party workers are more active and, therefore, need more constant satisfaction from the 'POMP' suppliers in terms of popular and easily defensible policies. Such constant satisfaction is not easy to deliver. Thus, this section will seek to explore whether this has serious implications for Conservative Governments in London. The most important questions to be addressed, therefore, are what are the major functions of Conservatives away from the central elite, how can their effectiveness and loyalty be strained by 'POMP' and can such undermining and disaffection eventually react back badly on the centre in the form of an increased chance of General Election defeat?

In my assessment of the role of geographically peripheral Conservatives, it should be noted that I include District, County and Regional Councillors as part of the non-elite 'grass roots' cadre. This, I feel, can be justified due to the hierarchical nature of the Party, as demonstrated by the large amount of power vested in the Leader and the small degree of influence ascribed to other levels<sup>160</sup>. Therefore, a multiplicity of functions for the grass roots is

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<sup>157</sup> Whiteley *et al*, 1994, p218.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Andrew Gamble, 16.3.00.

<sup>159</sup> Gamble, 1974, p6.

<sup>160</sup> As assessed in greater detail in Chapter 2.



suggested. They are required for the essential 'POS' functions of: representing Conservative interests on Local Councils and committees<sup>161</sup>, organising local support through canvassing, leafleting, fund-raising, the focusing and directing of General Election campaigns and the 'selling' of central Government policies to the local electorate<sup>162</sup>.

We saw in Chapter 2 that the National Union and Conference have little effect as a check on the policies of the leadership<sup>163</sup>. The main areas where the Leader may be challenged in theory are in the Conservative Policy Forum and regarding Party funding and candidate selection. Especially with regard to Scotland, however, there are also significant 'POMP' functions for non-elite Conservatives. As well as being formulated with regional sensitivity, policies have to be 'sold' to the electorate once they are implemented. As we have seen in my study on the sale of Council Houses, such policies were made at least partly with the intention to court votes out of gratitude. If left to their own devices, it is not guaranteed that voters will always be able to make the connection between the two variables<sup>164</sup>. This observation corresponds with Gamble's conclusions on the random nature of the mass electorate<sup>165</sup>. Therefore, it would seem that local representation and direction is indeed important. Thus, it is essential that there is a well-motivated and effective local team of Conservatives to raise the profile of the benefits of new policies. As David McLetchie and Lord Lang noted, it is

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<sup>161</sup> It should be noted that even if control of a Local Council was in opposition hands (as was often the case in Scotland), significant numbers of Conservatives sitting on a council could temper local policies and help to marshal support in the wards that they represented.

<sup>162</sup> Interviews with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>163</sup> Whiteley *et al*, 1994, p29.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>165</sup> Gamble, 1974, p7.

impossible to maintain an election campaign level of enthusiasm around the UK at all times<sup>166</sup>. However, as local activists are required to keep working for the Party between General Election campaigns, the need to ensure their co-operation through the provision of adequate resources and, more importantly, popular and easily defensible policies is apparent.

Ian Gilmour notes that public disapproval of the Government had grown to record proportions in the summer of 1995 (see Chart 2.7). This was due to: “(P)alpable incompetence and inadequate leadership, higher taxes, Conservative disunity and the Government’s extremism”<sup>167</sup>. Not only was this a slight on the Conservatives’ ‘POMP’, but also a strong indicator that an administration must avoid fragmenting its own party to prevent members from stopping working and the general image of untrustworthiness that can be transmitted thereby to the electorate at large. 1995 marked the first elections to the new Unitary Councils in Scotland. The nature of the Conservative campaigns there demonstrates the nature of the relationship between national and local politics. We have already seen that many voters in Local Government Elections base their choices on national issues. Whilst this does not always mean that they will vote for the same party that they usually support in General Elections, it renders the actions of Westminster Parliamentarians very important to representatives in Local Government. If this thesis’ hypothesis is proved correct, therefore, it would have been very important for the Conservative elite in London to protect their own General Election chances by supporting their Local Government representatives with popular and easily defensible policies. We shall see throughout this thesis how many aspects of the ‘POMP’ did not achieve this goal. Conservative

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<sup>166</sup> Interviews 19.1.01 & 27.3.01.

<sup>167</sup> Gilmour, 1997, p367.

candidates highlighted this problem in the 1995 Local Government Election campaigns. Many Scottish Local Government candidates openly implored the electorate to base their decision on local, rather than national issues<sup>168</sup>. The Conservatives had a reasonable record in local service provision in Scotland<sup>169</sup>. However, it was realised by Party Local Government representatives north of the border that this would count for nothing if the electorate took the Party's record in national Government into consideration.

In the immediate post-war years, the Conservative Leadership placed great importance on their local members. Before nation-wide mass media, the elite in London relied on their peripheral members to act as a 'canvasser corps' and 'ambassadors in the community'<sup>170</sup>. Importantly, grass roots members were not used as foot soldiers only. Their opinions and local knowledge were also taken into account. Whiteley *et al* acknowledge that the Party Leader in London did not have to, and rarely did, take any notice of such advice<sup>171</sup>. However, the increased levels of self-worth felt by the ordinary members justified the façade. Such myths keep Party workers interested and out on the streets. When they felt that such influence in London had disappeared, Scottish Party workers quit their tasks in droves<sup>172</sup>.

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<sup>168</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002. Scotland on Sunday, 2.4.95, p10 & Scotsman, 5.4.95, p8, which contains an interview with Sir Michael Hirst, the then Chairman of the Scottish Conservatives.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>170</sup> Whiteley *et al*, 1994, pp4 & 188 & CCO 2/1/17.

<sup>171</sup> Whiteley *et al*, 1994, pp5-9.

<sup>172</sup> Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00, Viscount Younger, 14.2.01, Lord Lang, 27.3.01, Ross Harper, 6.8.01 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

With regard to the modern era of mass media, Whiteley *et al* cite Butler and Kavanagh's study of the 1987 Election<sup>173</sup>. In this analysis, local campaigning in the modern era is seen as irrelevant. It is claimed that General Elections are won on national issues. It is not certain that such sentiments can be applied to Scotland. As this thesis seeks to emphasise, 'local' matters are very important there<sup>174</sup>. All parties ignore these special circumstances at their peril. If parties are prepared to conclude that only UK-wide issues matter, then great temptation to ignore their geographically peripheral grass roots members and Councillors will arise.

At interview, a senior Conservative Party official explained the formal arrangements between the Conservatives in London and Scotland<sup>175</sup>. He was very keen to stress that separate parties existed north and south of the border. The Scottish Party enjoys representation at formal institutions like the Conference and has its own chairman and campaign team. He was adamant that the relationship with London is one of co-operation, with no question of dictation from the metropolis. In formal institutional terms, this may well be the case. Lord Sanderson defended this position by upholding the genuineness of the autonomy of the Scottish Associations<sup>176</sup>. However, the frequency of Scottish Conservatives joining other quasi-nationalist complaints against London<sup>177</sup> either suggests that their autonomy allowed them too much freedom or that they were indeed feeling alienated by their own Party's actions.

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<sup>173</sup> Whiteley *et al*, 1994, p189.

<sup>174</sup> Interviews with James Mitchell, 8.6.00 and David McLetchie, 19.1.01.

<sup>175</sup> Anonymous Interview, 21.6.00.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01 & Lang, 1994, p9.

Lord Strathclyde was prepared to admit that the Conservatives, when in Government, do not always pay enough attention to their grass roots members as should be the case<sup>178</sup>. It should be noted that local activists do tend to agree with the central Party more often than not, and can be just as vocal in demonstrating this approval as any kind of disaffection<sup>179</sup>. However, certain issues such as the Poll Tax, VAT on domestic fuel and the 'Options for Change' military cuts were examples of concerted Scottish Conservative militancy. Lord Sanderson added the issues of Devolution and privatisation to this list, and confirmed that local opposition was only likely to be heard if their agent was skilful and in favour with those in power<sup>180</sup>. An example of such an effective agent was the work done for the Stirling area when Michael Forsyth was MP. The effect of local militancy was often minimal initially, as demonstrated by the fact that the policies stayed in place. It should be noted that opposition to metropolitan policies was often voiced not because the local activists disagreed with the terms of, or ideas behind, the policies, but because they could see what damage was being done to the Party's cause in Scotland<sup>181</sup>.

As was the case with Local Government representatives of the Opposition parties, the Poll Tax generated much disquiet amongst Conservatives in Scotland. Whilst they may have agreed with the neoliberal opinions behind the Tax and the economic reasoning for it, Conservatives north of the border quickly saw the need for change if electoral disaster was to be avoided<sup>182</sup>. In order to maintain some credibility with the electorate, Conservative Councils in

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00.

<sup>179</sup> An opinion repeated by Lord Mackay of Clashfern – Interview 22.1.01 and Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish – Interview 25.1.01.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>181</sup> Anonymous Interview, 21.6.00.

<sup>182</sup> Glasgow Herald, 4.9.89, p12.

Scotland were forced to set higher Poll Taxes than they would have wished in order to maintain local services. Rather than heeding their requests for more of the budget surplus to be spent on subsidising the Tax in order to prevent such increases, the central Government sought to admonish these Councils for being unfaithful to the creed of 'Rolling Back the State'<sup>183</sup>. Thus, for ignoring information coming from the geographical periphery, the Party elite was further jeopardising Conservative support in Scotland.

Lord Sanderson identified another danger for the Party based on local issues<sup>184</sup>. If the Parliamentary seat was seen to be safe, the MP and central Party would become 'lazy' and pay even less attention to local members. This never seemed to be a problem when central policies and local attitudes converged. When this was not the case through the 1980s and 1990s, the Party was to regret not having a better-established local organisation in place to help in election campaigns and to sell potentially unpopular, but economically necessary, central policies to the local electorate<sup>185</sup>.

David McLetchie bemoaned the fact that the membership in Scotland has been too submissive at times<sup>186</sup>. He was worried that there was not always enough policy development activity that could have shared resources between London and Scotland. He was not happy with the age structure of the Party membership either. From the 1980s onwards, there was not enough coming from the younger generation of Scots to equal the concurrent vibrancy being enjoyed by

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 3.3.90, p1.

<sup>184</sup> Interview, 30.11.00.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01.

<sup>186</sup> Interview, 19.1.01.

the Labour Party through its trade union activist membership. Lord Fraser also acknowledged that not much policy input was coming to London from Scotland<sup>187</sup>. However, he also felt that it was unlikely that any major ideas from north of the border were completely ignored or suppressed. A bigger problem with regard to local members in Scotland, he felt, was the way in which London was not always able to recognise the unexpressed fears of their supporters north of the border. For example, many Scottish Conservatives were worried about unemployment. Even if their jobs were secure, the future was not looking so healthy for their children. Such individual fears impacted heavily on voters' perceptions of the Government's ability to manage the whole economy.

The next reason for Conservative 'POS' failure in Scotland to be examined is how Scottish Conservatives, including the Party's representatives in Local Government, were becoming further alienated from the Party in London. This was due to a perceived increase in central control of Party affairs; a tendency that hurt their national identity and seemed to be a paradox within a Party that was espousing so much Devolution to individuals on the geographical periphery.

### ***The Effect of Centralisation on Conservatives in Scotland***

It should be noted here that the government of Scotland was still left very much to those north of the border in the years after the Act of Union in 1707. Furthermore, Scottish Tory MPs

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<sup>187</sup> Interview, 5.3.01.

were always managed by Scots in the pre-Dundas era<sup>188</sup>. Of course, party discipline was not the same as in modern times, but the idea of only Scotsmen taking decisions that would affect Scotland alone was present (the 'West Lothian question' had yet not arisen). Even in the days of the Oxford administration in the Eighteenth Century, it was realised that peripheral members had to be kept satisfied with tokens such as effective systems patronage and some control over their own areas<sup>189</sup>. This system carried on into the Twentieth Century, with patronage and the utilisation of a local elite to act as agents for the distant metropolitan Government being accepted practice in traditional Conservative territorial management strategy.

Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes cite Robert Blake's assertion that anti-centralisation is one of the most important tenets of conservatism<sup>190</sup>. Having the power to go against such tradition demonstrates the influence of the Leader, in this case, Mrs Thatcher, on the direction to be taken by the Party. However, it should be noted that there is a school of thought that argues that centralisation of power was on the metropolitan Conservative elite's agenda at least since the Second World War. This argument is best exemplified by Seawright, who claims that, ever since the Maxwell-Fyfe reforms of the late 1940s, the metropolitan Party believed that running the various geographical regions in the same 'professional' style as Smith Square was the optimum way forward<sup>191</sup>. This suggests that any autonomy for local Associations is a myth. Such close control from London is also evident in the quite insistent manner in which guidelines for

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<sup>188</sup> David Hayton in Ellis, Steven & Barber, Sarah (eds.): "Conquest & Union. Fashioning a British State 1485-1725", London, Longman, 1995, p298.

<sup>189</sup> Riley, P. W. J.: "The English Ministers and Scotland 1707-1727", London, Athlone, 1964, p169.

<sup>190</sup> In Berrington, Hugh (ed.): "Britain in the Nineties – the Politics of Paradox", London, Frank Cass, 1988, p100 + Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.



ostensibly local issues such as the appointment of Agents are dictated<sup>192</sup>. The appointment function demonstrates how powerful the central Leadership can be, and how misguided they can be in the exercising of this strength. It must be noted that some Scottish Conservatives, in the shape of the MPs based in London, were in favour of such reforms<sup>193</sup>. However, those closer to events in Scotland, such as the Scottish Unionist Association, always felt that they were better placed to run the Party north of the border.

The elite in London was impervious to such analyses of the situation. Thus, in 1965, the Divisional Councils were replaced by larger Regional Councils and closer association with English leadership: “(U)nder the guise of rationalisation”, was brought in<sup>194</sup>. The Scottish Conservatives expressed gratitude for the help they were receiving from London in their post war regeneration programme. However, the feeling that ‘London knows better’ seems to permeate many metropolitan communications with Scotland. The usual excuse given is that there is better access to professional resources in London<sup>195</sup>. However, the amount of control afforded to the metropolis is plain to see. One of the main complaints of Central Office in the early 1950s came whenever they did not receive copies of memoranda or other pieces of information that were circulating north of the border<sup>196</sup>. ‘Intelligence reports’ from the Party elite in Scotland were gratefully received<sup>197</sup>, but it seems that Central Office wanted to make up its own mind regarding

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<sup>191</sup> Seawright, 1999, p8.

<sup>192</sup> CCO 2/1/17.

<sup>193</sup> Seawright, 1999, p12.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, p26.

<sup>195</sup> CCO 2/1/17.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> (As long as the reports were accurate... Central Office was not always convinced) CCO 2/2/18.

Scottish affairs by examining unadulterated original evidence<sup>198</sup>. This insistence on all Scottish correspondence being available in London carried on into the 1960s, again showing the Central Office's desire to oversee, rather than being there to serve<sup>199</sup>.

Any remaining sensitivity to Scottish needs and desires seemed to end when Mrs Thatcher invoked a more unitary attitude to the running of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister was undertaking an exercise in the nationalisation of power<sup>200</sup>. Such policies were unpopular with Scots; especially when subsidies were removed from local industries, which were expected to fend for themselves in the free market, just as businesses in all other parts of Britain were<sup>201</sup>. Mrs Thatcher's failure to adapt to the political culture of Scotland, as her predecessors had acknowledged the need to, led to electoral demise<sup>202</sup>. Traditionally, power and officialdom had been based in Edinburgh to allow Scots easy access, thus preserving their national distinctiveness and pride<sup>203</sup>. Writing in the midst of the changes, Bulpitt assesses the new instrumental populism of Thatcherism thus:

“(T)he Thatcher government appears to have adopted a very radical territorial code, forsaking the traditional reliance on intermediate collaborative elites [sic] for a direct link with the citizenry”<sup>204</sup>.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> CCO 2/6/20 & 2/7/13. Access to more recent files in the Party archive is restricted.

<sup>200</sup> Garner & Kelly, 1998, p62.

<sup>201</sup> This dynamic is explored in much greater detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>202</sup> Seawright, 1999, p158.

<sup>203</sup> Birch, Anthony H.: “The British System of Government – 9<sup>th</sup> Ed.”, London, Routledge, 1993, p270.

<sup>204</sup> In: Madgwick & Rose (eds.), 1982, p168.

Central power and autonomy was being increased under the guise of promoting individuals. Bulpitt was referring to Local Government reforms in this piece, but it can be inferred that the Conservative elite in London was making sure that all forms of criticism to their central direction would be by-passed. It is not certain that administrative Devolution gives a local elite an increased sense of political power<sup>205</sup>. However, it would appear that removing a local Party elite's authority to decide what was best for its own members might have more serious consequences for the central Conservative Leadership. If Scots in general were deserting the Conservatives, then even the Party's own members must have been disillusioned as well by this piece of domineering leadership from London<sup>206</sup>.

Mrs Thatcher ordered an examination of Scottish Conservative organisation after the General Election disaster of 1974. Consequently, a committee headed by Russell Fairgrieve recommended in 1977 that even closer integration with Smith Square was needed. The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association was to align its constitution with that of the National Union and Scottish constituency affiliation fees were to be paid to Central Office. However, some awareness of Scottish sentiments remained. It was noted that total integration with London would alienate many Scottish Conservatives. Therefore, it was agreed that a Scotsman would remain in charge of organisational administration and that Scottish moneys would be kept nominally separate from national Party funds<sup>207</sup>. Fundamentally, however, the Scottish Party

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<sup>205</sup> Keating, Michael: "State & Regional Nationalism – Territorial Politics & the European State", London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988, p125.

<sup>206</sup> Consequently, they were much less likely to work effectively for what they perceived to be a lost cause – Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00, Viscount Younger, 14.2.01, Lord Lang, 27.3.01, Ross Harper, 6.8.01 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>207</sup> Seawright, 1999, p27.

had become heavily integrated with the National Union<sup>208</sup>. Seawright quotes the Deputy-Chairman of the Scottish Conservatives, Bill Hughes, bemoaning this fact in 1990. Mr Hughes said in the Sunday Times Scotland of 12.8.90 that the Scottish Conservatives were only a branch office of the UK Party. The fact that the Scottish Conservatives are not even registered for VAT in Scotland shows how their autonomy has been eroded in favour of central control. The Scottish MPs who had promoted more central professionalisation in the 1960s had not envisaged this degree of London dominance. The Conservative leadership in London was again flexing its considerable muscles over the way the Party was to be run<sup>209</sup>. To highlight the dangers of centralising against the wishes of Scottish Conservatives, Seawright writes:

“A wellspring of discontent at the ‘local level’ for the Tories hindered the party’s appeal to its electoral environment. It became a reinforcing alienation, as the party increasingly ‘centralised’ it lost the important local activists... who could assuage feelings of alienation at local level”<sup>210</sup>.

Removing Scottish Conservatives’ advisory powers in London was not only a political mistake; it was also an affront. The Scottish Conservatives were best placed to advise London on local sentiments towards the Government. Eminent Scotsmen such as George Younger and Malcolm Rifkind were aware of the damage being done to Conservative chances in Scotland by Mrs Thatcher’s new form of ‘statecraft.’ Therefore, they tried to voice these opinions in the appropriate forum of the Cabinet. James Mitchell complained that these Scots did not put forward their case with sufficient fortitude<sup>211</sup>. As Mrs Thatcher was not aware of the particular

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<sup>208</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>209</sup> Seawright 1999, pp27-28.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p31.

<sup>211</sup> Interview, 8.6.00.

circumstances in Scotland, she needed to be given accurate information<sup>212</sup>. This might not have always been forthcoming due to career protection reasons; furthermore, the Party Leader was able to exercise ultimate power and either take no notice of the advice, or remove the sources<sup>213</sup>.

Gamble cited William Whitelaw as an example of a Scot being able to get close to the Prime Minister/Party Leader. David Seawright did not agree with this particular choice, but confirmed the theory using George Younger and Malcolm Rifkind as examples within the Thatcher Administration<sup>214</sup>. Alik Buchanan-Smith detected and tried to reverse this trend as early as the early 1960s. It should be noted that, whilst he did manage to get his representations to the highest levels, they were often marked with the annotation: “No reply needed”<sup>215</sup>. Similarly, detailed election strategies were shown tacit interest, but no practical support was forthcoming<sup>216</sup>. It should also be noted that some Scottish Conservatives were co-opted into Thatcherite ideas on territorial management. For example, Michael Forsyth was prepared to rebuff and defeat the Scottish Conservative dissident Iain Lawson who had wished to highlight and challenge the metropolitan Government’s regionally insensitive policy regarding the closure of the Gartcosh steel plant<sup>217</sup>. With regard to the hypothesis under consideration, it is important to note that many Scots, when they perceived that the Conservative Governments in London were somehow acting in a regionally insensitive or ‘anti-Scottish’ manner, often looked to

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<sup>212</sup> As the Glasgow Herald pointed out, all that Scottish Conservatives had to do to demonstrate the contemporary problems to the Prime Minister was to show her opinion poll data – 5.9.85, p1 (on the occasion of a Prime Ministerial visit to Scotland). However, no one seemed prepared to do so.

<sup>213</sup> Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00 + two unattributable, Winter 2000-2001.

<sup>214</sup> Interview, 13.4.00.

<sup>215</sup> E.g. CCO 2/5/20.

<sup>216</sup> CCO 2/6/20.

alternative sources of political authority. In many instances, such an alternative was found in Local Government<sup>218</sup>.

James Kellas writes:

“The balance of power between the British and Scottish... organisations is tilted overwhelmingly to the British end. The leaders of the British parties control the party organisations and have the decisive voice in drawing up the party manifestos”<sup>219</sup>.

Kellas believes that consensus is the ideal way to solve intra-party centre-periphery arguments. Otherwise, there always seems to be an element of coercion in the imposition of central direction. Coercing Scottish Conservatives to accept policies decided in England can only lead to resentment; especially, as we have seen, if Conservatives in Scotland realise how much damage is being done by a particular policy on a local level. Garner and Kelly are prepared to conclude that ordinary members can have some influence over the Party’s direction<sup>220</sup>. The increase of better educated middle class members has led to the dictates of the elite being put under more sophisticated scrutiny<sup>221</sup>. Thus, Jim Bulpitt’s assertion that the leadership must react to popular sentiment within the Party to maintain electoral organisation and support, a key concept for this thesis, may have some credence<sup>222</sup>.

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<sup>217</sup> Stirling Observer, 22.11.85, p1.

<sup>218</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>219</sup> In: Seldon, Anthony (ed.): “UK Political Parties Since 1945”, London, Philip Allan, 1990, p123.

<sup>220</sup> Garner & Kelly, 1993, p127.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>222</sup> Bulpitt, 1986, p21.

Mrs Thatcher, however, was quite prepared to go ahead with plans to transfer as much power as possible to London in spite of the potential effect on peripheral members<sup>223</sup>. This upset Scots in general with regard to Local Government. However, a precedent had been set for London to have the ability to dominate in as many aspects of peripheral life as fitted in with the idea of central autonomy. Mrs Thatcher was hostile to too many influences diluting her policies. Consequently, the Scottish Conservatives were to see their influence diminish rapidly. This era marked a real depression in Scottish Conservative spirits. Consequently, they no longer felt inspired to work for the good of the Party. It seemed to them that there was no point in doing so<sup>224</sup>.

Alice Brown *et al* give one of the most strident criticisms of Mr Major's Prime Ministership based on this topic<sup>225</sup>. They note how attempted policies such as school opt outs from Local Education Authority control demonstrate how the Prime Minister was willing to act without consulting the Scottish Conservative elite. Such a tactic was likely to cause friction within the Party and guarantee unpopular policies. No one could give better analysis of local public opinion than Party members in Scotland. Mr Major ignored them to his cost. The trend towards centralisation was not reversed when Mr Major entered office. Ian Gilmour asserts that it was taken even further, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of powerful QUANGO's<sup>226</sup>.

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<sup>223</sup> Gilmour, 1997, p369.

<sup>224</sup> Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00, David Mcleitchie, 19.1.01, Viscount Younger, 14.2.01, Lord Fraser, 5.3.01, Lord Lang, 27.3.01 & Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>225</sup> Brown, Alice; McCrone, David & Lindsay Paterson: "Politics and Society in Scotland", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996, p105.

<sup>226</sup> Gilmour, 1997, p369.

As has been mentioned, one of the worst courses of action that a metropolitan administration can undertake with regard to Scotland is the centralisation of decision making power towards London. It should be remembered that most Scottish opposition to government from London is not concerned with the imposition of somehow 'foreign' rules. Rather, the Scots are more worried that their distant governors will not be sensitive to the distinct needs and desires of the nation<sup>227</sup>. Such a viewpoint is often put forward by the Conservatives' opponents from the left. It can be argued that the Conservatives complied with tradition for most of the Twentieth Century and paid attention to the distinctiveness of Scotland. The Central Office was prepared to accept that the word "Conservative" should be kept out of Unionist literature<sup>228</sup>. Winston Churchill had even countered Labour's nationalisation programmes in the early 1950s with arguments including the potential removal of self-direction from Scotland<sup>229</sup>. An internal Party report on the General Election of 1955 identifies the two most important indicators of voting intention<sup>230</sup>. Anti-nationalisation was confirmed to be a prime motivation for Conservative supporters. Party loyalty is seen to be very important for voters of all persuasions. Therefore, we have more evidence that the Conservatives acknowledged that they had a support base in Scotland but still, by implication, that they had to treat it well to inspire continued loyalty.

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<sup>227</sup> Mitchell, James: *Unionism, Assimilation and the Conservatives*, in: Contemporary Political Studies, (3), 1995, pp1376-1383, p1377.

<sup>228</sup> CCO 2/3/18 & CCO 2/5/20 – access to more modern files in the Conservative Party archive is restricted.

<sup>229</sup> Campaign Guide, 1950, p513.

<sup>230</sup> CCO 2/4/15. This period marked the zenith of Conservative electoral support in Scotland.



An important cause of the Party's demise north of the border towards the end of the Twentieth Century was their failure to realise that this loyalty was not as deep-rooted as in England. Voters are more prepared to experiment with minor parties as protest votes towards 'POMP' in local elections. These votes in England were generally made by Conservative and Labour renegade supporters who were easy to 're-attach' at the next General Election, rather than by committed partisan supporters of the minor parties<sup>231</sup>. Major problems arose for the Conservatives when these voters did not return to them at subsequent General Elections in Scotland. This was a particular problem when, towards the end of Twentieth Century, core-periphery divisions re-opened<sup>232</sup>.

Pippa Norris cites Vernon Bogdanor's argument that this core-periphery division re-opened because class was becoming less of a determinant of voting<sup>233</sup>. The traditional role of class may indeed have been waning in England. This role was defined early in the 1980s by David Robertson as the only factor that mattered in British electoral politics, 'because nothing else does'<sup>234</sup>. Interestingly, Robertson saw class as less of a factor in Scotland at the time due to other important local issues such as religion and Devolution (dealt with in Chapter 4). However, a major cleavage with England occurred in this respect towards the end of the decade. Somewhat ironically, class/socio-economic status and well-being was in fact to replace issues of Church and constitution for Scottish voters as the Government sought to remove these questions from the political agenda. In England, the Conservatives were able to preside successfully over a

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<sup>231</sup> Bo Sarlvik in: Sarlvik, Bo & Crewe, Ivor: "Decade of dealignment. The Conservative victory of 1979 and electoral trends in the 1970s", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p341.

<sup>232</sup> Norris, 1997, p131.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

'classless' society of individuals, as the economy was sufficiently buoyant there. North of the border, however, by removing religion and Devolution from politics, all the Government managed to do was highlight the Scots' economic misfortunes even more and thus generate collective opposition. This is a case of opposition to the Conservatives based on what Robertson defines as 'class related economic phenomena'<sup>235</sup>.

Given the relatively poor economic performance of Scotland and the more frequent occurrence of communities there being closely bound together around centres of industrial employment, the high potential for locally-organised opposition to the Conservatives is evident. The main hypothesis to be tested empirically in Chapter 7 of this thesis was generated by my elite interview programme. If any substantial findings are made, therefore, their importance will be magnified by the fact that, whilst some senior Conservatives were aware of the problems, nothing was done to alleviate the situation.

### ***Conclusion: Conservative Local Failure in Scotland & the 'POS'***

Lord Fraser asserted that, up until the 1970s, Scottish Conservative Associations had very often been at the heart of their communities. In this chapter, we have seen the importance of local communities in Scotland. As Lord Fraser asserted, Conservative local politicians often did very well for the Party's 'POS' north of the border by having a high profile at the usually commercial heart of these communities<sup>236</sup>. Local Councillors had done very well by adopting a 'stand up and be counted' approach to their Conservatism. Rather than trying to distance

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<sup>234</sup> Robertson, David: "Class and the British Electorate", Oxford, Blackwell, 1984, p13.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, p32.

themselves from the Party, they had decided, as Mr Major tried to do in 1992, to court the votes of those in Scotland who wanted the Union to remain intact and furthermore enjoy the Conservatives' economic responsibility. Once policies from London began to alienate Scots, these Local Councillors were doomed to lose office, thus taking local Conservative organisation with them.

At interview, David McLetchie and Lord Fraser were convinced that mid-term protest votes against the Conservative 'POMP' damaged the Party's General Election chances very badly in Scotland<sup>237</sup>. Scottish Conservative representatives in Local Government had been put in an untenable situation both by their association with the administrations in London and by having to try to 'sell' and defend a succession of policies that were deeply unpopular in the contemporary economic climate in Scotland. This chapter has shown why Local Government Election losses could have been so dangerous for the Party's General Election chances. This has been done by identifying the importance of Local Councillors in Scottish communities, astute Labour Local Government manoeuvres and use of the media and some inappropriate metropolitan policies that all had malevolent effects on Conservatives at the local level in Scotland. Importantly, we have also seen how Conservatives at the local level in Scotland became disaffected with the Party elite. This soured relationship compromised the enthusiasm with which they worked in the 'POS.' That the Thatcher administrations were so keen to minimise the role of Local Government north of the border demonstrates its pervasive effect on Scottish society very clearly. Furthermore, Conservative Party organisation north of the border

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<sup>236</sup> Interview, 5.3.01.

<sup>237</sup> 19.1.01 & 5.3.01.

was focused quite precisely on these local representatives. Therefore, once these Councillors were out of office, often through little fault of their own, the local cells that looked to them for direction (the local 'platoons' as Lord Lang referred to them<sup>238</sup>) crumbled. Thus, the amalgamation of the local cells that used to constitute a basis for Conservative 'POS' in Scotland was no longer possible. Consequently, Opposition representatives in Scottish Local Government were free to establish ideological hegemony and rally the voters against the Conservatives in elections at all levels.

The next chapter of this thesis examines ways in which the Conservatives' 'POMP' of the 1980s and 1990s caused perennial unpopularity in Scotland both in General and Local Government Elections. Given what has been shown to date, one would immediately expect that the actions of the Party leadership must take the blame for any unpopularity or credit for any successes, as the elite has a very high degree of control over the 'POMP.' However, it should also be remembered that Conservative leaders are working at a disadvantage in Scotland. As this chapter has explored, natural disposition has grown against the Party in Scotland due to a succession of unpopular policies and the nature of the local political culture. Therefore, the Party has to work extra hard north of the border to achieve electoral success<sup>239</sup>.

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<sup>238</sup> Interview, 27.3.01 and Lang, 1994, p9.

<sup>239</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

# *Appendix A*

## *‘Right to Buy’ Legislation in the 1980s*

The *Housing and Building Control Act 1984* extends the ‘Right to Buy’ in England and Wales [Synopsis].

*Housing Defects Act 1984*. Local Authorities were forced to pay reinstatement grants to, or buy back from, any purchaser of a defective property of theirs. Lee notes that, between 1980 and 1984, Governmental spending on housing dropped 30% in Scotland<sup>240</sup>. This was a lower figure than in England. However, because the Scots were more dependent, the cut had a more devastating political effect than south of the border.

The *Housing Act 1985* consolidated what had gone before. IV, I, 100 (1) permitted Local Authorities to re-imburse tenants for any improvements that they may have made to their dwelling and IV, I, 101 (1) dictated that Local Authorities are not allowed to raise the rents of their properties that have been improved in this way. The system of 100% mortgages being made available to all those taking advantage of the ‘Right to Buy’ scheme was introduced by V, I, 133 (5)<sup>241</sup>. XIV, I, 435 (1) (a-c) granted Local Authorities permission to give loans to prospective purchasers or home improvers. XIV, I, 435 (3) confirmed this power, even if the property in question was not actually in the Local Authority’s area. First-time buyers were to be

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<sup>240</sup> Lee, C. H.: “Scotland and the United Kingdom. The economy and the Union in the twentieth century”, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995, p201.

given more help by the new power of the Secretary of State to 'make advances' to lending institutions for this purpose [XIV, I, 445 (1)]. Thus, the New Right programme of property-ownership extension was to be furthered with the help of Building Societies and Local Authorities at only minimal expense to the central Government<sup>242</sup>. XV, I, 460 (1) confirmed the power of Local Housing Authorities to give grants for improvements and repairs to dwellings in their areas. Consequently, the market values of the properties would rise. This benefit was considered more than sufficient payoff for the central Government, which had to foot up to 90% of the bills [XV, I, 516 (1-3)]. With respect to this central spending, however, it is essential to note the conditions of XVI, I, 528 (1). Here, the Secretary of State retained the ultimate power to decide which buildings are worthy of spending central Government money on to remedy defects. This clause offset the duty put upon Westminster to help Local Authorities with the costs of repairs and reinstatement grants and repurchases of defective dwellings that were sold off [XVI, I, 569 (1) (a-b)].

The *Housing Associations Act 1985* continued the Government's programme for encouraging the dismantling of the old housing regime. Housing Associations were to be non profit-making residence providers and developers [I, I, 1 (1) (a-b)]. A Housing Corporation was to be set up to oversee this part of the industry (thus ensuring national co-ordination) [I, I, 17 (1)]. It was the remit of this Corporation to promote the development of Housing Associations

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<sup>241</sup> This measure was revoked in 1993, after it had become too expensive.

<sup>242</sup> The plan to use of Building Societies in this way had first come to light in the Party manifesto of February 1974 (in: Dale (ed.), 2000, p214).

[III, I, 75 (1) (a-e)] and to make loans to groups or individuals for housing needs [III, I, 79 (1)]. To this end, it would be allowed to borrow directly from Whitehall [III, I, 92 (1)]<sup>243</sup>.

Under the terms of the *Landlord and Tenant Act 1985*, it was also insisted that landlords (often Local Authorities in Scotland) were obliged to keep their properties fit for human habitation [I, I, 8 (1) (a-b)]. Maximum rents were imposed, as was an obligation to make repairs if rent was to be payable [I, I, 8 (5) and I, I, 11 (1) (a)].

The terms of III, I, 16 (1) of the *Building Societies Act 1986* made the Government's plans quite clear. This clause widened the scope of who may be eligible for a Building Society loan<sup>244</sup>.

As they felt that run down Council Estates were a breeding ground for socialism, the central Government saw fit to provide funding to regenerate in the *Housing and Planning 1986* [Synopsis]. This Act went on to proclaim that 32% + 1% per year of tenancy (up to a maximum of 60% of the market value) was to be the new offer for houses; discounts on the purchase of flats were to be calculated at 44% + 2% per year of tenancy (up to 70% of the market value) [I, I, 2 (2) (a)]. I, I, 3 (2) permitted the Secretary of State to allow even more generous discounts in Scotland.

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<sup>243</sup> The formation of a Housing Corporation is mentioned as part of proposed Housing Finance Acts in the Party manifestos of February and October 1974 (ibid, pp214 & 244).

<sup>244</sup> The compliance of building societies in the provision of mortgages was essential, even when central or Local Government were supplying substantial loans or improvement grants. Building Societies were heavily involved in the 'self-build' housing project in Stirling that was praised by Prince Charles – *Times*, 7.10.86, p5.

## ***4. Conservative ‘Politics of Metropolitan Power’ and the Party’s Demise in Scotland 1979-1997***

### ***Introduction***

In this chapter, I wish to summarise and explore policies and further aspects of Scottish society that have been identified as causes of the Conservatives’ slide towards electoral defeat in 1997. Hereby, we shall be able to assess the relationship between ‘POMP’ and ‘POS’ and see whether there seem to be deficiencies in the current canon of explanations for the Party’s electoral problems in Scotland. One of the key dynamics to bear in mind during this chapter is how central policies that were unpopular in Scotland reduced the Conservatives’ chances in elections for Local Government, as well as in General Elections. This thesis tests whether this reduction in Local Government representation was particularly dangerous for the Party in Scotland. Therefore, the prime focus of this chapter is not on the pockets of local opposition that grew in Scotland, such as the campaign to save Ravenscraig Steel Works mounted by Motherwell District Council. Rather, it seeks to investigate the ‘POMP’ that caused problems with the Party’s ‘POS’ in Scotland. The final section of the chapter is an assessment of the major existing explanations for the Conservatives’ electoral decline in Scotland. This review helps to put this chapter’s findings in perspective and explains how this thesis hopes to complement the existing body of literature.



## ***Scottish Anti-Conservatism (or Vice-Versa?)***

One question to keep in mind is whether there was more to the Conservatives' unpopularity in Scotland than just a succession of policies that were difficult to accept because they caused unemployment or higher taxes and so on? If the Scots did not hold some kind of extra pre-disposition against the Conservatives, the Party might have been able to win them over with policies that improved household income and standard of living, as they did south of the border. If such a natural pre-disposition against the Conservatives did exist amongst the Scottish electorate, however, then the Party would have had to work much harder to maintain the 'POS' through their policies. Therefore, before examining the effect of specific policies that were known to cause the Conservatives problems in Scotland such as the withdrawal of industrial subsidies and the Poll Tax, we shall explore more deep-rooted obstacles that they had to overcome.

As the Conservatives came to power in 1979, 50% of opinion poll respondents thought that the Party could only be trusted 'rarely' to look after the special interests of Scotland<sup>1</sup>. Even if they are not extreme separatists, many Scots feel a sense of national pride and are thus keen to see their needs and desires respected by London<sup>2</sup> - a key tenet in both the 'POMP' and 'POS.' Therefore, we begin to see the roots of considerable distrust and unpopularity for the Party. Some reasons for the Conservatives' in-built disadvantage north of the border to be examined

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<sup>1</sup> Gallup Political Index Report, #226, June 1979, pp10-14.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with James Mitchell, 8.6.00, Anonymous, 21.6.00 & William Paterson, 13.9.01. In a Gallup poll in May 1996, 49% of respondents in Scotland said that they felt 'Scottish first, British second' (18% said 'Scottish only'; 13% 'British first, Scottish second') – Gallup Political & Economic Index, #429, May 1996, p6.

are (quasi-)institutional such as the four party system. Other explanations may be classified as more 'cultural' such as the effects of national identity. Another very important personal factor was the unpopular character of Mrs Thatcher in Scotland. As we shall see, Opposition groups, including those in Local Government, exploited many of these problems and twisted them into the view that the English Conservatives were actually anti-Scottish. None of my Conservative elite interviewees gave the slightest credence to this view. However, its very existence was significant. Two questions to be addressed, then, are how could such a situation have arisen and what 'POMP' steps were taken to alleviate the problem?

The view that the Conservatives were anti-Scottish may have built up due to a stream of policies that did not seem to have the Scots' best interests at heart, in favour of the more powerful lobby south of the border. Such a progression fits in with the proposition that the Conservatives were dangerously neglecting their levels of support in Scotland by concentrating on England. Mrs Thatcher's memoirs and the words of Lord Strathclyde are most persuasive when denying an anti-Scottish bias in the Party elite. The Prime Minister lauds Scottish luminaries such as Adam Smith and David Hume for inspiring many of her attitudes and policies<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, it seems that she had a 'soft spot' for the Scots, for it was they who played a major role in bringing down the Callaghan Government after the Devolution referendum of 1979<sup>4</sup>. Lord Sanderson confirmed that Mrs Thatcher appreciated the help that Scotland could be. She was also encouraged to keep a high profile in Scotland by Peter

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<sup>3</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p622.

Thorneycroft and R. A. Butler. Lord Sanderson confirmed that this attitude did not disappear as soon as Scotland had played its role in bringing down the Callaghan administration. Even though her affinity for Scotland is phrased in her memoirs mainly to illustrate surprise that Thatcherism was not more popular north of the border, it is clear that the Prime Minister was not anti-Scottish in the way suggested by her opponents<sup>5</sup>.

Lord Strathclyde blamed a coalition of the Labour Party and Scottish media for the erroneous image that the Conservatives had to endure in Scotland. He asserted that Labour, seeing that they had no chance of persuading sufficient numbers of voters to support their own policies, turned to a virtually slanderous campaign to discredit the Conservatives<sup>6</sup>. Lord Sanderson added the strong Trade Unions and left-leaning educational establishment in Scotland to the list of *agents provocateurs* of the anti-Scottish reputation that was built up for the Conservative Party<sup>7</sup>. Most importantly for this thesis, cells of astute Labour activists in Local Government in Scotland were often mentioned as sources of anti-Conservative feeling and organisation north of the border<sup>8</sup>. I agree that the Conservative elite was not anti-Scottish *per se*. However, the evidence used by Labour was only available because of the policies that are studied here. By the general tone of much of their 'POMP, it may have seemed that the Conservatives were concentrating on the governance of England. Therefore, it would indeed

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<sup>4</sup> Bulpitt, Jim: "Territory and Power in the United Kingdom. An Interpretation", Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983, p191. Interviews with Lords Strathclyde, 8.11.00 & Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>5</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p291.

<sup>6</sup> Bulpitt, 1983, p191 & Interviews with Lords Strathclyde, 8.11.00 & Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, 30.11.00.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01, Lord Fraser, 5.3.01 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

have appeared on an unsophisticated level that they were anti-Scottish. It should be noted that the Conservatives were aware of the view and its unfortunate electoral implications. The current Strathclyde Commission on the reorganisation of the Scottish Party is very keen to redress this particular problem<sup>9</sup>. It should be noted at this point that a lot of Conservative elite interview material is utilised in this chapter. The recollections of these interviewees are always interesting, but are naturally biased towards their Party's view. Nonetheless, they are utilised in order to demonstrate what contemporary attitudes prevailed in the Party elite and consequently affected the 'POMP.'

### ***Mrs Thatcher's Personality***

This reason for the Conservatives' unpopularity in Scotland is not easy to quantify (opinion poll data notwithstanding), as it is such a subjective matter. However, the frequency with which it was mentioned by my interviewees, the literature and media suggests that it must be taken into serious consideration. Understandably, no interviewees wished to be quoted on this topic. However, it is possible to provide a clear picture of the situation without attributing sources directly. It was perceived in Scotland that Mrs Thatcher was an archetypal English middle class 'bossy' woman. All these factors made popularity seem very distant for her in Scotland<sup>10</sup>. The former Prime Minister even noted the seriousness of the problem by writing in her memoirs:

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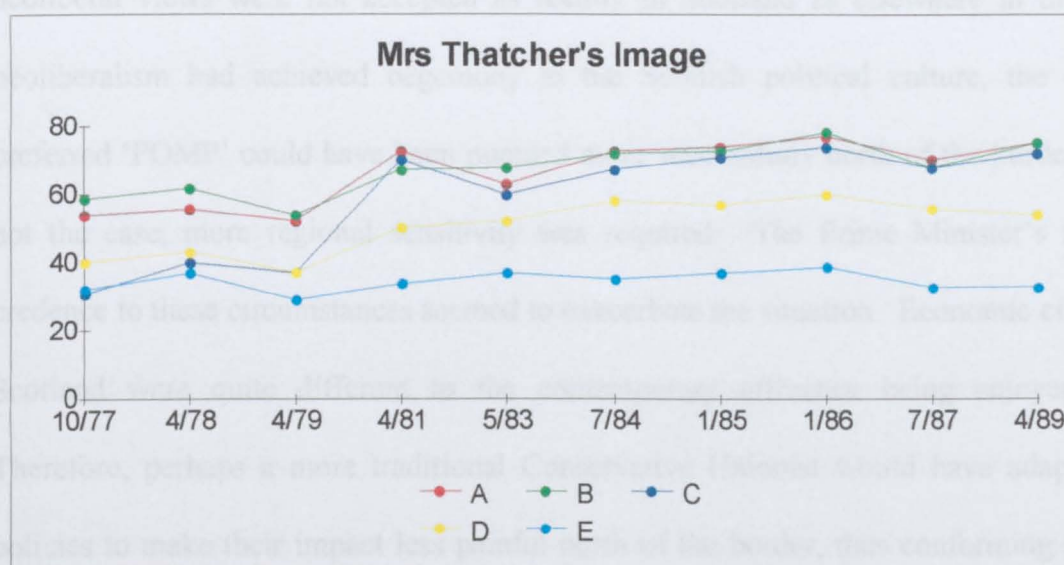
<sup>9</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00.

<sup>10</sup> Interviews with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 & Keith Harding 12.9.01.

“Some part of this unpopularity must be attributed to the national question on which the Tories are seen as an English party and on which I myself was apparently seen as a quintessential English figure”<sup>11</sup>.

Chart 4.1 represents positive responses (%) to the following propositions about Mrs Thatcher put by Gallup in UK-wide surveys:

- A: ‘She’s not in touch with the working class/ordinary people’
- B: ‘She thinks a lot of herself’
- C: ‘She divides the country’ [especially pertinent for the Scottish question]
- D: ‘She is a snob, talks down to people’
- E: ‘She’s catty/bitchy’



4.1 – Sources: *Gallup Political Index*<sup>12</sup>.

As can be seen, a lot of voters did not have a very good image of the Prime Minister. It is also evident that the situation deteriorated with time. Given the importance of personality in modern party politics, this factor hurt the Conservatives’ ‘POS.’ One could argue, however, that it was

<sup>11</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p624.

<sup>12</sup> *Gallup Political Index*: #295, March 1985, p9 and #344, April 1989, p8.

not directly tied to their 'POMP.' The Glasgow Herald offered the opinion at one point that no amount of tax cuts could save the Conservatives in Scotland due to the electorate's opinion of Mrs Thatcher's personality. On the event of a Prime Ministerial visit, the Secretary of State would have been well advised to tell Mrs Thatcher to stay away, for fear of causing more resentment by her very presence<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, the Government could have improved this image through the presentation of, or 'spin' put on, their policies<sup>14</sup>.

Elsewhere in her memoirs, Mrs Thatcher expresses surprise that her policies and neoliberal views were not accepted as readily in Scotland as elsewhere in the Union<sup>15</sup>. If neoliberalism had achieved hegemony in the Scottish political culture, the Conservatives' preferred 'POMP' could have been pursued more successfully north of the border. As this was not the case, more regional sensitivity was required. The Prime Minister's failure to give credence to these circumstances seemed to exacerbate the situation. Economic circumstances in Scotland were quite different to the contemporary affluence being enjoyed in England. Therefore, perhaps a more traditional Conservative Unionist would have adapted his or her policies to make their impact less painful north of the border, thus conforming to the 'POMP' restraints of Scottish political culture. Mrs Thatcher was not prepared to dilute her message of 'Rolling Back the State.' As we shall see (especially in Chapter 5), this was to have significant impact on the relationship between central and Local Government over issues such as subsidies

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<sup>13</sup> Glasgow Herald, 6.9.85, p10.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>15</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p618. Also noted in Hogg & Hill, 1995, p247 + Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01. It should be noted that there was at least tacit respect for the Prime Minister's assertiveness and directness north of the border - Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

and housing. As Viscount Younger and Ross Harper noted, one of the persistent roles of Local Government is to complain at their treatment by London<sup>16</sup>. Both interviewees conceded, however, that the discrepancy in power between the two levels of government is too great to ascribe significant checking power over central administrations to agents of Local Government.

This thesis contemplates the idea that a lack of Conservative representation in Scottish Local Government was particularly dangerous for the Party. Firstly, this may have been the case because there were no local Party leaders *in situ* to organise effective campaigning. With more direct relevance to the 'POMP', this dynamic may have been dangerous because there were few Conservatives in Local Government north of the border in any position to defend and 'sell' the policies that were emanating from London. Consequently, it would have been very difficult for the Party to achieve any sort of ideological hegemony in Scotland.

Defence of the 'POMP' on the local level in Scotland was essential as the Thatcherite free-market approach was not going to be readily compatible with traditional Conservative territorial management or the views of most Scots regarding what the state should provide for them. This was because the neoliberal system cannot allow for regional preferences and subsidies. Lord Fraser confirmed central Conservative beliefs of the time<sup>17</sup>. He questioned why Scotland should have so much extra money poured into its Health Service? On the whole, Edinburgh and Glasgow suffered no greater health problems than, say, Liverpool or Newcastle. It is also important to note the intractable nature of the Prime Minister's personality. She was

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<sup>16</sup> Interviews, 14.2.01 & 6.8.01.

not prepared to listen to bad news from Scotland and was determined that the best prescription for their ills was an increased dose of Thatcherism, which had worked so well in England<sup>18</sup>.

As Lords Sanderson, Mackay of Clashfern and Younger pointed out, Mrs Thatcher never ignored Scotland. They claimed that she always kept abreast of developments there and always wanted the best for the nation<sup>19</sup>. They also noted how she was popular north of the border as Leader of the Opposition in the late 1970s. These recollections suggest that, in the 1980s, the Prime Minister may have been ignorant of the true needs and desires of Scotland, in spite of her best efforts. Alternatively, an external force was exaggerating her characteristics, which she could do nothing about, and transforming them into an image that the Scottish electorate was going to be hostile towards. The most plausible explanation for the Scots' apparent change of heart between the 1970s and 1980s came from Lords Strathclyde and Fraser<sup>20</sup>. The Opposition parties in Scotland were looking for a convenient 'hook' upon which to hang their arguments, arguments that were appealing to the voters' nationalist sentiments. Thus, the fact that the Prime Minister seemed distant and unwilling to create policies that were sensitive to the particular needs of the fragile Scottish economy were mixed with her personality to create a view that she was actually anti-Scottish. It does not seem that this was the case, but it became a very familiar and effective weapon against the Conservatives north of the border.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview, 5.3.01.

<sup>18</sup> Unattributable interview comment – Winter 2000-2001.

<sup>19</sup> Interviews 30.11.00, 22.1.01 & 14.2.01.

<sup>20</sup> Interviews, 8.11.00 & 5.3.01.



One often-overlooked aspect of this topic is the lack of a viable alternative at the time. Unpublished MORI data from 1979-1983<sup>21</sup> confirms that Mrs Thatcher was held in very low esteem north of the border, and that Labour, as a party, were likely to receive many votes. However, Michael Foot did not seem to be a credible alternative at the time. The answer: 'Don't know', as to who would make the best Prime Minister, scored only fractionally below the two major party leaders.

It is interesting to note the contrast with Mr Major's personality. During the early months of his administration, the new Prime Minister was able to enjoy popularity in Scotland simply because he was not Mrs Thatcher, such was the level of unpopularity that she had built up through the 1980s<sup>22</sup>. James Mitchell and Lord Lang noted that the Conservatives had (and continue to have) great potential support across Scotland<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, a fresh start was required in 1990. The removal of Mrs Thatcher was a great step forward in this respect. Thus, successful policies put forward by her successor should have found popularity both north and south of the border. This chapter assesses whether this was the case? Another issue that has caused the Party much trouble and is very much specific to the geographical periphery is that of Devolution.

### ***Nationalism and Devolution***

This is not an appropriate place to try to explore the whole Scottish nationalist arena and see how it has contributed to the Conservative demise since the Second World War. That task

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<sup>21</sup> Supplied to me from their records by MORI's Edinburgh office.

<sup>22</sup> Unattributable interview comment, Winter 2000-2001 + Gilmour, 1997, p353.

<sup>23</sup> Interviews, 8.6.00 & 27.3.01.

has been undertaken elsewhere<sup>24</sup>. However, there are specific aspects of the issue that particularly troubled the Conservative Party from 1979-1997. If Devolution was, as Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish asserted, the underlying priority of most Scots, the issue cannot be ignored<sup>25</sup>. Devolution never topped the polls in order of importance to Scottish voters; topics such as unemployment and the Poll Tax were seen as momentarily more important. However, the importance of issues such as these tended to wax and wane with (in)appropriate measures in the 'POMP.' Nationalism/Devolution, on the other hand, is like religion insofar as nothing short of a revolutionary move in the 'POMP' such as the institution of a Scottish Parliament can even partially remove the issue from the Scottish voters' agenda. Therefore, as Lord MacKay confirmed, the Conservatives still need to address their previously unsuccessful attitudes.

This part of the thesis should be approached with the English Party's concerns about Devolution being the start of a 'slippery slope' towards the break up of the United Kingdom and consequent firm Unionist stance always in mind. The most frequent expression of nationalist opposition is that Westminster administrations of any party do not have a legitimate mandate to govern the Scottish nation. As we have seen in the last chapter, in the eyes of many Scottish voters, this relationship with London confers more of a right to govern on Local Authorities in Scotland; thus rendering crucial the role of Scottish Local Government in the 'POS.' The lack of mandate problem was exacerbated when Conservative Governments were in power as they frequently polled less than a quarter of the General Election vote in Scotland and only had MPs

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<sup>24</sup> For example Mitchell, 1995 & Mitchell, James: "Strategies for Self-Government. The Campaigns for a Scottish Parliament", Edinburgh, Polygon, 1996; Lynch, 1999 & Seawright, 1999.

representing a handful of seats north of the border. The other main argument against Devolution brought by the Conservatives in the 1980s was the increased amount of bureaucracy that it would engender<sup>26</sup>. These attitudes were to colour their relationship with Scotland, including Local Government and their own Party members there<sup>27</sup>. The tactics employed by the Conservatives during the late 1970s when Labour were seeking to institutionalise Devolution show what attitudes were going to be dominant when Mrs Thatcher became Prime Minister. Furthermore, little rhetoric on the question appeared from the Party thereafter, as they erroneously believed the issue to be ‘dead’<sup>28</sup>.

The Conservative Campaign Guide of 1977 claimed that the Party was always interested in the views of the Scottish people. However, it was felt that sufficient Devolution was present in the form of the Scottish Office and the ‘holy trinity’ of autonomous Church, legal and education systems north of the border<sup>29</sup>. Given the danger to the Union posed by any more Devolution plus the opportunity to defeat the Callaghan Government over such a contentious issue, it was clear that the Conservatives were going to oppose any legislation<sup>30</sup>. The actual principle of Devolution had not been completely ruled out by the Conservatives. Thus, they had remained true to their ethos of pragmatically analysing each circumstance to discern what policy within reason would be best for them at the polls (the apparent introduction of less flexibility in

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<sup>25</sup> Interview 25.1.01.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01 + Thatcher, 1993, p619.

<sup>27</sup> It was noted in Chapter 2 that these Unionist opinions were genuinely felt principles, rather than being a pragmatic vote-winning exercise. However, we also noted the benefits that might have been obtained if more flexibility had been possible.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>29</sup> This opinion was repeated by Lord Strathclyde – Interview, 8.11.00.

the Thatcher years is examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis). At that time, the specifics of the Bill before Parliament and the state of affairs in Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole led them to believe that opposition was in order.

Alternatives to Labour's Devolution plans were considered within the ranks of the Conservative Party. It is a true measure of its awareness of the 'POS' when an elite is prepared to sacrifice some of its own dogma and listen to peripheral members in an effort to keep them working. However, as was discussed in Chapter 2, such internal democracy was not a typical characteristic of the Conservative Party under Mrs Thatcher. Francis Pym came up with a programme that would increase Parliamentary scrutiny of legislation concerning Scotland by Scottish MPs<sup>31</sup>. Thus, voters north of the border would have known that issues specific to their interests were being discussed a little closer to home. However, the important decisions would still have been taken in London. Just as when the novelty of earlier pieces of Devolution had worn off, it would have been realised soon that Scotsmen in London were far more likely to hear the instructions of their political masters or mistresses rather than the lamentations of those they were supposed to be representing<sup>32</sup>. A significant example of such administrative Devolution was the creation and subsequent moving to Edinburgh of the Scottish Office.

Due to Conservative amendments, the referenda about assemblies in Scotland and Wales in 1979 were never likely to pass. This was the case. Again, the Nationalists removed their

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<sup>30</sup> "Campaign Guide", 1977, p515.

<sup>31</sup> CRD 4/5/13.

<sup>32</sup> Unattributable interview comment, Winter 2000-2001.

support from Labour. A fatal blow was dealt to the Callaghan administration when a vote of confidence was proposed and lost<sup>33</sup>. Mrs Thatcher was keen to take over. As we have seen, an explanation for her actions with regard to territorial management as Prime Minister was that she believed that Devolution was a dead issue after the failure of the 1979 referenda.

Being closer to the people of Scotland, some Conservatives north of the border realised that this was not the case and expressed the idea that the incremental granting of limited Devolution during the 1980s and 1990s would have helped to stem the waxing nationalist movement<sup>34</sup>. However, such a plan was never seriously considered because of the fear of the ‘slippery slope’<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, there has not been any tacit admission with hindsight from within the Party that such a compromise might have been useful<sup>36</sup>. The Conservatives believed themselves to be a devolutionary party of sorts; with power being delegated to individual citizens on the periphery, rather than legislative or bureaucratic bodies<sup>37</sup>. The Conservatives were trying to find an intermediate point between their brand of Devolution and something that would have satisfied the nationalists. Such a compromise may have saved the Party some support. However, good intentions count for very little without actual policies that could pacify nationalist protests. James Mitchell concluded that the Conservatives should never ‘dabble’ in Devolution in any way, as it is alien territory for them and there are too many risks involved in entering their

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<sup>33</sup> Sked, Alan & Cook, Chris: “Post-War Britain. A Political History – 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.”, London, Penguin, 1993, pp317-323.

<sup>34</sup> Hogg & Hill, 1995, p247 & Anonymous Interview, 21.6.00.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>36</sup> Interviews with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

opponents' stronghold<sup>38</sup>. As we saw in Chapter 2, this attitude seemed to inform the Party's 1992 General Election campaign. Rather than appear weak through being the fourth most enthusiastic party for Devolution, the Conservatives adopted a strong Unionist stance. That Election saw the Party's Scottish fortunes rise momentarily.

Perhaps the most enduring result of Scottish nationalism is its generation of a four party system north of the border. As David McLetchie, amongst others, was very keen to point out, the addition of a viable fourth party in the shape of the SNP has further restricted the Conservatives' chances of success north of the border<sup>39</sup>. Approximately 60% of Scots vote consistently for the Labour Party. Therefore, to have another contender in the race for only 40% of the voters is a severe handicap<sup>40</sup>.

Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish expanded on this point<sup>41</sup>. Unlike other nationalist movements in Europe, the SNP were able to lure voters from the Conservatives. Around the continent, parties of the same centre-right persuasion as the British Conservatives are usually the natural home for 'patriots.' Therefore, it was somewhat incongruous to see social conservatives north of the border voting for someone other than the Conservative Party because of the Devolution issue. This seems to have been a result of the Party's anti-Devolution stance plus a moderation of SNP economic policies that allowed voters of the centre-right to choose them as a

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<sup>38</sup> Interview, 8.6.00.

<sup>39</sup> Interview, 19.1.01; re-iterated by Keith Harding – Interview, 12.9.01.

<sup>40</sup> Especially in a 'First Past the Post' electoral system – Interview with David McLetchie, 19.1.01.

<sup>41</sup> Interview, 25.1.01.

viable alternative to the Liberals or Labour<sup>42</sup>. Elsewhere in Europe, the Conservatives would not have had to worry about losing votes to nationalists. However, because of these special Scottish circumstances, the Party would have been well advised to guard against ill-conceived ‘POMP’, as the SNP could indeed have benefited<sup>43</sup>. Thus, due to a quirk of the Scottish electoral system, an extra dimension to the relationship between the ‘POMP’ and ‘POS’ was evident.

A devoutly unitary Government could never countenance Devolution. Therefore, personal economic prosperity was promoted as being a more worthwhile goal than ‘lofty’ constitutional issues in the 1980s<sup>44</sup>. When Devolution finally did become an issue in the 1992 General Election campaign, the Conservative vote in Scotland actually went up. Thus, their Unionist stance might not have been so much of a catastrophic problem. In 1997, when the issue was very divisive, the Conservatives’ Unionist policy was one of the least of their worries in Scotland<sup>45</sup>. As the electoral data in this thesis’ Introduction shows (Chart 1.1), the Party’s popularity was declining rapidly in all parts of the Union. Therefore, the disaffection shown in Scotland was shared in England. English voters would not have complained at Unionism unless it was exerting financial strain on them. One proposition in this area is that industrial closures in Scotland were easier for the Government to contemplate because of the associated reduction on the tax burden in England. The vital point to note at this stage is that, in the Elections where Mrs Thatcher and Mr Major were victorious, Devolution never seemed to damage the

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<sup>42</sup> It should also be noted that the Liberals and Labour also adopted a more nationalist tone in Scotland to attract these voters away from the Conservatives – *ibid*.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>44</sup> Willetts, David: “Modern Conservatism”, London, Penguin, 1992, p95.

Conservatives' chances in Scotland more than any other policy issue. Nevertheless, it should always be remembered that any consolidation of antipathy towards the Party might have been manifested in poor Local Government Election results. The effect of these seemingly minor local losses is key to this thesis. Starting with the industrial subsidy issue, we will now examine specific policies with their genesis in the neoliberal Thatcherite creed and how they affected Local Government and the 'POS' in Scotland.

### ***Unitary Government & the Withdrawal of Industrial Subsidies***

The heavy industries of coal, steel and shipbuilding had formed a substantial backbone for the Scottish economy through the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Their slow demise was to cause 'POS' problems for the Conservatives at both ends of the social spectrum. As overseas competition increased after World War Two, Scottish industry had to rationalise to stay competitive. The first problem that this caused for the Conservatives was that many of their rich company-owning contributors in Scotland lost their fortunes and were no longer able to promise money or the votes of their workers. The employers had been able to do this through the deferential system that has been mentioned elsewhere in this thesis<sup>46</sup>. We have already seen how Protestant working class support has helped the Conservatives in urban Scotland<sup>47</sup>. Therefore, an even more important implication of industrial demise north of the border has been how much damage has been done to this sector. These 'POS' problems were not, however, a direct result

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<sup>45</sup> Only 14% of Scottish respondents said that self-government was 'The most important issue' in deciding their General Election vote – Gallup Political & Economic Index, #429, May 1996, p6.

<sup>46</sup> Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00, Lord Fraser, 5.3.01 & William Paterson, 13.9.01.

<sup>47</sup> Interviews with Lords MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 and Fraser, 5.3.01 + William Paterson, 13.9.01.



of Thatcherite 'POMP.' Well before the 1980s, market forces had dictated the downturn in the fortunes of Scottish industry. The Conservatives in London had even been able to derive some political capital from the situation in Scotland. In the 1950s, Labour planned to use nationalisation as a tool to fix the problems in hand<sup>48</sup>. With regard to Scotland, the Conservatives were able to cite this as another demonstration of centralisation against the interests of the Scottish nation<sup>49</sup>.

Nevertheless, Thatcherite industrial policies were to have a very significant effect on the 'POS' in Scotland. In the 1980s, the metropolitan Government believed that a 'dependency culture' permeated working class Scotland<sup>50</sup>. In times of economic hardship, this culture expected help in the form of subsidies<sup>51</sup>. Britain as a whole was not being won over to the Conservatives' message of self-help. It may have been popular when the economy was healthy. However, when times started to get more difficult, positive replies to the question of whether people should help themselves, rather than rely on the Government – a key tenet of Thatcherism – dropped rapidly below 50%<sup>52</sup>. The Scottish expectation for subsidies was never going to be met by Mrs Thatcher with her emphasis on market forces, individual self-help, a unitary lack of

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<sup>48</sup> Seawright, David & Curtice, John: *The Decline of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party 1950-92: Religion, Ideology or Economics?*, in: Contemporary Record, 1995, pp319-339, p335.

<sup>49</sup> Bogdanor, Vernon: "Devolution in the United Kingdom", Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p146.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Gallup Political Index, #289, September 1984, p10. Positive replies to the same question totalled 42% in September 1986, 39% in May 1987 (Gallup Political Index, #321, May 1987, p11) and only 33% in June 1987 (Gallup Political Index, #322, June 1987, p11).

regional preferences and minimal Government intervention and expenditure<sup>53</sup>. The Party faced an almost impossible dilemma in the 1980s. Economic reason dictated that it would be disastrously inefficient to keep heavy 'smokestack' industries open with Government subsidies<sup>54</sup>. Political expediency, on the other hand, suggested that any 'POMP' actions that seemed to be against the interests of those employed in these industries would have a malevolent effect on the Party's 'POS' in Scotland. Not only would newly unemployed voters be unlikely to vote Conservative in General or Local Government Elections, but Party Association members and Local Councillors in Scotland would face an overly difficult task of justifying and supporting very unpopular central 'POMP.' Consequently, local representation and campaign work on behalf of the Party would dwindle. The General Election dangers of this situation form the core of this work's hypothesis.

Nevertheless, the programme to reduce Government subsidy was eventually instituted and Scottish industry was left to 'sink or swim' in the maelstrom of the market. Even as early as 1980, nearly a third of the population was blaming Government policy for commercial problems<sup>55</sup>. By the middle of the decade, this attitude was calmed only by a shift in blame towards Japanese imports. The main worry amongst the Party at the time was that the

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00 – as demonstrated by the minimal effect of a large increase in Government spending 1981-1982 – see Chart 4.2. This decision was taken in the face of the fact that 85% of Scottish respondents said that it would be a good idea for the Government to subsidise industry (even 79% of English respondents agreed to this), Gallup Political Index, #226, June 1979, p13. An unpublished MORI poll at the time reported that 91% of Scottish respondents saw unemployment as the most important contemporary problem. 67% of those polled felt that the Government should perform a 'U-turn' with its policies.

<sup>55</sup> Gallup Political Index, #287, July 1984, p13.

Government's economic projections were inaccurate<sup>56</sup>. These projections forecasted economic recovery in Scotland. They were eventually borne out, but not until many voters had had to seek new employment.

In 1981, there was little sign of what was to come. The *Iron and Steel (Borrowing Powers) Act* of that year even permitted British Steel Corporation borrowing to increase by up to approximately £1000m [I, I, 1 (2)]. This tone was continued in the *Iron and Steel Act 1981*. There, I, I, 3 (1-2) absolved the BSC from its liability to pay off long-standing Government loans. These actions do not seem to be those of an administration looking to wind down an industry. Indeed, I, I, 1 (2) and I, I, 1 (3)(a) of the Act seemed to positively encourage the industry by releasing it from the burden of having to supply all domestic demands and allowing the Corporation to look abroad for business. However, even though this policy could be presented as dynamic encouragement, it was also leaving the industry more prone to the pressures of the international market.

These measures were taken in spite of the requests made by the Secretary of BSC in a written representation to the Industry and Trade Committee in the 1979-1980 session. Here, it is argued that, even though the Corporation was expecting a £2.5bn improvement by 1983-1984, it still required help with fighting reduced domestic demand and global over-capacity<sup>57</sup>. Whilst the Corporation was looking to open new markets, it was also hoping to reduce costs and was

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>57</sup> HC758, 1979-1980, pp v & 14.

investigating whether capacity should be lowered<sup>58</sup>. In this document, it is clear that the BSC wanted continued Government subsidy to cover its operating losses<sup>59</sup>. Therefore, it seems that it was not just the workforce that was having difficulty in adjusting to the new attitudes that were appearing in Government.

Initial Thatcherite legislation regarding the coal business seemed to be anything but against the industry. At this point, it should be remembered that the new Conservative administration was still consolidating and faring perilously in the polls. Therefore, it was prudent, in spite of the Prime Minister's economic principles, to alleviate any protest from the working class that would have been engendered by unsympathetic legislation<sup>60</sup>. Consequently, the *Coal Industry Act 1982* saw the borrowing power of the National Coal Board rise by around £1000m [I, I, 1]. Government grants to the NCB were to rise from £525m to £1000m [I, I, 2 (2)]. Furthermore, Government subsidies for pit closures and redundancies were also to rise [I, I, 4 (1-2)]. The central Government's popularity in the industrial areas of England and Scotland did not fall any more dramatically than in other regions from 1979 to 1983<sup>61</sup>. Therefore, it seems that there must have been a sea-change in 'POMP' part way through the Thatcher years to cause such a failure in support as the Party suffered in Scotland and the North of England.

Perhaps one of the earliest examples of such a change being manifested in legislation came in the *British Shipbuilders Act 1983*. This Act, one of the last of the first Thatcher

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern 22.1.01.

Government, insisted that British Shipbuilders should take more responsibility and be more efficient [I, I, 2 (1)]. Thus, the Government's intention to relinquish control of industry to the markets is revealed. Such policies make jobs more insecure. British Shipbuilders had noticed the new trend in policy early in the Thatcher years. In their representation to the Industry and Trade Committee in 1980, they note how they were remaining competitive and within spending targets in spite of reduced subsidy. Not only was this industry looking for Government subsidy, they were also hoping for help in exchange rate policy and permission to extend credit to their customers<sup>62</sup>. Such intervention seemed increasingly unlikely, as witnessed by the Government's attack on the inefficiencies of nationalised industries in the 1983 manifesto<sup>63</sup>.

The *Trade Union Act 1984* was another measure that perpetuated the popular sentiment that the Government did not have workers' interests at heart and were anti-Trade Union<sup>64</sup>. I, I, 1 (1)(a) of this Act insisted on secret and fair ballots for senior union positions and I, I, 10 (1) made the same requirement for strike action to be legitimised. Lord Sanderson noted how strong the Trade Unions were in Scotland at this time<sup>65</sup>. Consequently, opposition to the Conservatives grew further once these activists were able to use the content of these pieces of legislation as evidence that the Government was somehow campaigning against the interests of Scottish workers in favour of the more prosperous white-collar community of the Southeast of England. At this time, the seemingly anti-Trade Union direction being taken by the Government was

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<sup>61</sup> "Dod's Parliamentary Companion – New Parliament Edition", 1984: pp515-548.

<sup>62</sup> **HC758**, 1979-1980, pp15-16.

<sup>63</sup> In: Dale (ed.), 2000, pp291-292.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01.

<sup>65</sup> Interview, 30.11.00.

becoming clearer to the electorate. Disapproval of legislation banning strikes went up approximately 15% from the last poll (taken at the end of 1977)<sup>66</sup>. However, it should also be noted that out of all the issues facing the country at the time, the Government's Trade Union policies were amongst their most popular with a large section of society<sup>67</sup>. The Government's fortitude on this issue was about to be tested by the National Union of Mineworkers.

The initial terms of the *Coal Industry Act 1985* seemed to show that industrial policy had not changed that much. For example, I, I, 1 (1) of that Act still bound the Government to make grants to the NCB to help to clear its debts. However, on further inspection, there were subtle changes that hurt Conservative support among the working class industrial community. This happened once the unions had translated technical policies into their own language. Government money was still to be made available to the coal industry even though it was in the throes of a bitter strike at the time. However, I, I, 1 (4) forbade future increases in the amounts involved and I, I, 3 (2) saw the levels of redundancy grants rising only by an insignificant amount. Thus, in effect, the Government was reducing the burden placed on affluent English taxpayers by industrial support and making a firm statement to the militant Trade Unions. This process was continued in the *British Shipbuilders (Borrowing Powers) Act 1986*, where the amount that the industry could have was only allowed to rise by £100m. This was a much smaller amount than precedent would have suggested. A similar pattern is apparent in the *Coal Industry Act 1987*. There, I, I, 2 (1) still allowed for the Government to pay grants for deficit

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<sup>66</sup> Gallup Political Index, #282, February 1984, p12.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, #307 March 1986, p8.

elimination in the industry. However, important funds were being withdrawn in the form of the abolition of pit closure grants, closure costs notwithstanding [I, I, 4 (1)].

With particular respect to Scotland, the Government's legislative programme for helping industrial development did seem to have a pro-English slant. As David McLetchie pointed out, the help being afforded to British Leyland's Longbridge plant was particularly galling to Scots who were losing their industrial jobs<sup>68</sup>. The figures involved were substantial. British Leyland was to receive £1440m between 1979-1983<sup>69</sup>. The *Industrial Development Act 1985* concentrated on the expansion of the Industrial Estates Corporation south of the border and extended the borrowing powers of the Welsh Development Agency [I, I, 2 (1) & I, I, 5 (1)]. Some rectification seemed to be in the offing with the *Scottish Development Agency Act 1987*. I, I, 1 of this Act promised a rise in the SDA allowance from £700m to £1200m. However, as Chart 4.2 shows, this seems to have been somewhat of a smoke screen (given the proximity of a General Election) as subsidies for Scotland were quickly reduced in other areas.

By this time, the Conservatives were struggling badly in Scotland. A Gallup poll in September 1986 showed that 77% of Scottish respondents disapproved of the Government's record to date, whilst 79% said that they were dissatisfied with Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister<sup>70</sup>. Amongst people who had voted Conservative in 1983, unemployment was cited as the most important reason by any who had decided to change their allegiance in the next

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<sup>68</sup> Interview, 19.1.01.

<sup>69</sup> HC294, 1980-1981, p1.

<sup>70</sup> Gallup Political Index, #313, September 1986, p18.

Election; and a mere 4% felt that the Conservatives had the best policies to deal with Scotland's economic problems<sup>71</sup>. There was a clear link between the Conservatives' 'POMP' relating to industrial Scotland and their fading chances in Local Government and General Elections. However, it seems that the Party elite felt that the correct remedies were already in place.

As the end of the 1980s approached, a particular aspect of the Conservatives' industrial policy ethos was legislated into being. Privatisation had always been mooted, but was somewhat controversial to attempt just before a General Election. After the 1987 Election, the Conservatives felt secure enough to introduce this measure. As we saw in the Introduction to this thesis (Chart 1.1), their support had risen to comfortable levels in General Elections in England. This was not the case north of the border, however. Consequently, this apparent further attack on the traditional structure of Scottish industry was seen as another great affront. The *British Steel Act 1988* announced the dissolution of the British Steel Corporation and that it was in the gift of the Government to appoint a successor [I, I, 1 (1)]. The Government was to be given the option to purchase securities in the successor to BSC [I, I, 4 (1)(a)], but would only be liable to loan the new company funds during the transitional period [I, I, 8 (1)]. It should be noted here that some Scottish Conservatives were beginning to see the potential damage to the Party's support north of the border over this issue. They asked BSC to make their actual plans public<sup>72</sup>. However, lack of insistence from the metropolitan Government, who were keen to see the privatisation programme through, meant that this issue was not raised again. The *British*

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Even in May 1996, only 15% of respondents felt that the Conservatives had the best policies to deal with unemployment in Scotland – *ibid*, #429, May 1996, p5.

<sup>72</sup> Glasgow Herald, 2.3.90, p5.



*Coal and British Rail (Transfer Proposals) Act 1993* furthered the privatisation programme into the Major era. This perpetuation of a policy that was unpopular in Scotland can be understood, though, given the statistic that nearly 40% (the highest score in the poll) of the (UK) population felt that the Government was getting its privatisation programme 'about right'<sup>73</sup>.

Concurrently, the Government was continuing to reduce the support it traditionally offered to heavy industry. Thus the *Coal Industry Act 1990* initially seemed to follow more traditional lines. I, I, 1 (1) promised that the Government could continue to make grants to the industry to help to cover its deficits. However, that the Government was not prepared to continue to shore up an economic disaster is shown by their willingness to increase the amounts available for redeployment and workforce reduction grants. I, I, 2 (3) of the *Coal Industry Act 1990* said that these amounts should rise from the 1987 levels of £300m to £1250m (with a maximum ceiling of £1500m). Whilst initially costing the tax payers extra, the nature of these one-off payments show that the Government wanted to close the issue once and for all and no longer have to spend public money on large subsidies. This attitude was echoed in the *Coal Industry Act 1992*, which increased the same payments in this industry from £1250m to £2500m (maximum £3000m) [I, I, 1 (3)].

Whilst these reforms were being instituted, other industrial policies seemed to be perpetuating the popular sentiment that the Conservatives were somehow not acting in the interests of workers in Scotland. The *Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993*

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<sup>73</sup> Gallup Political Index, #342, February 1989, p8.

abolished minimum wage requirements in the limited sectors where it had already been instituted [III, I, 35]. As mentioned earlier, the Welsh also seemed to be doing better than their geographically peripheral counterparts in Scotland. The *Welsh Development Agency Act 1988* saw this institution's financial limit rise from the 1975 figure of £450m to £700m [I, I, 1]. With regard to the housing issue, Peter Walker was able to stand up for Wales effectively. Successive Secretaries of State for Scotland did not seem to wield so much influence with the Prime Minister. However, it should be noted that Scotland has tended to do better out of the Barnett Formula than Wales<sup>74</sup>.

Lord Mackay of Clashfern felt that the subsidy reduction episode caused the most problems for the Party in Scotland<sup>75</sup>. He gave the following rationale for the pursuit of these policies which, even at the time, the Government knew were going to be unpopular. The policies were pursued because they were 'right.' In this instance, being right meant following economic reason and reducing the tax burden by pulling Government support out of dying industries. When a policy is said to be right, one must consider just whom it is right for<sup>76</sup>? In this instance, it was indeed right for affluent English voters who were going to reward the Conservatives for the lower tax bills that they were enjoying.

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Opinion polls at the time put it to the respondents that policies were not being changed because the Government felt that they were right. Even so, the question ran, did the policies need changing? In June 1983, 63% thought so; by September 1984, this figure had risen to 69% (Gallup Political Index, #289, September 1984, p10). See Appendix A to this chapter for an analysis of the proposition that the Government was too rigid/inflexible.

David McLetchie, Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Viscount Younger and Lord Lang were all most keen to defend the policy insofar as, in the long run, it has been justified by the regeneration of the areas of Scotland involved<sup>77</sup>. Indeed, the Conservatives did institute tax conditions favourable to investment, which now sees, for example, (mainly American-owned) high-technology industries flourishing in 'Silicon Glen' and the re-trained area around Ravenscraig enjoying better employment rates than it did when the steel plant was open. However, it is open to debate whether the Governments of the 1980s knew for certain that this would be the case<sup>78</sup> or whether they were just happy to enjoy the popularity accrued in England from the tax cuts at the time of subsidy reduction<sup>79</sup>? Furthermore, as Chart 4.2 shows, any improvements in the Scottish unemployment situation were also accompanied by momentary increases in Government spending. The close correlation between rising subsidy and falling unemployment levels in Scotland is apparent (for example 1986-1987 and 1993-1995; as is the converse, as demonstrated by 1983-1984 and 1991-1992)<sup>80</sup>. These trends show that the Party was deluding itself if it was thinking that it was their long-term investment promotion strategy alone that was re-vitalising the Scottish economy. One of the main aims of the subsidy reduction programme was to reduce the burden it was placing on taxpayers. It was not possible to solve the unemployment problem in Scotland without going back on this promise.

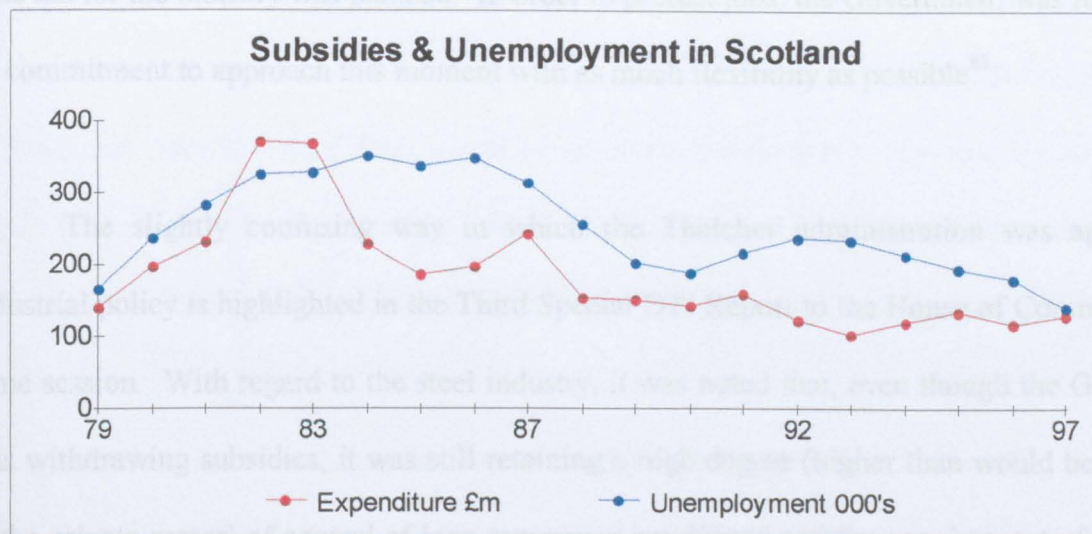
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<sup>77</sup> Interviews 19.1.01, 25.1.01, Written Statement dated 22.1.01, Interviews 14.2.01 & 27.3.01.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>79</sup> Relying on this source of popularity was another risky strategy as the decade wore on. Whilst less than half of respondents felt that Government services should be extended, even at the cost of higher taxes in 1980, the figure had risen to nearly 70% in 1986 (Gallup Political Index, #234, February 1980 & #308, April 1986, p12).

<sup>80</sup> Correlation calculations for all of the British regions are presented in Appendix B to this chapter.



4.2 – Sources: *The Scottish Abstract of Statistics*<sup>81</sup>.

The winding down of the steel industry in Scotland demonstrates how Thatcherite policies went too far in the pursuance of market values and helped to create an irredeemable ‘POS’ situation for the Party in Scotland; a situation that they were forced to acknowledge well before the electoral disaster of 1997. There was plenty of warning for the Government as to the potential unpopularity of the policies north of the border. The Second Report of the Trade and Industry Committee in 1984-1985 urged the Government to re-consider the imminent closures and pleaded the steel industry’s case citing the recent difficulties of the miners’ strike as a mitigating circumstance for poor performance<sup>82</sup>. It was openly acknowledged that the end of

<sup>81</sup> *The Scottish Abstract of Statistics*: Number 14, 1985, p205 - #15, 1986, p20 - #16, 1987, p186 - #19, 1990, p172 - #20, 1991, p16 - #23, 1994, p20 - #24, 1995, p19 - #25, 1996, p275 - #26, 1998, pp274 & 285.

<sup>82</sup> HC474, 1984-1985, p vii.

state aid for the industry was planned. In order to protect jobs, the Government was reminded of its commitment to approach this moment with as much flexibility as possible<sup>83</sup>.

The slightly confusing way in which the Thatcher administration was approaching industrial policy is highlighted in the Third Special DTI Report to the House of Commons in the same session. With regard to the steel industry, it was noted that, even though the Government was withdrawing subsidies, it was still retaining a high degree (higher than would be permitted in the private sector) of control of loan repayment conditions and the appointment of successors to the British Steel Corporation<sup>84</sup>. Therefore, not only were the Conservatives going to be unpopular for ending state aid, they did not even seem to be giving the industry a fair chance of recovering and flourishing naturally in the free market.

Perhaps the most high profile manifestation of this problem in Scotland was the closure of the steel rolling mill at Ravenscraig. An announcement was made in May 1990 by British Steel plc, the Government appointed quasi-private successor to the BSC – a privatisation that was worth £2425m in 1988<sup>85</sup> - that the plant was to close with the loss of 770 jobs (out of a total of only 3200 in the town)<sup>86</sup>. Even though this was a commercial decision being made by a supposedly independent corporation, links between their misfortune and Government policy by the voters of the region were inevitable<sup>87</sup>. The situation was not helped by the decision six

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> HC334, 1984-1985, p vii.

<sup>85</sup> Cook & Stevenson, 2000, p188.

<sup>86</sup> HC473, 1990-1991, p v.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

months later to close the plant at Clydesdale with the loss of a further 1200 jobs. British Steel plc tried to justify the decisions by citing the fact that profits were down 27% during the summer of 1990 and that £80m to £100m would be saved by the closure of Ravenscraig alone<sup>88</sup>. The Trade Unions, in response, tried to defend the plant by citing its cheap costs and excellent delivery record and optimistically predicted increased demand. Another source of defence for the plant was the Motherwell District Council. They brought up a typical Scottish argument asking why jobs were in danger in their area whilst the industry in England (e.g. Redcar) and South Wales (e.g. Port Talbot) was still benefiting from high levels of Government investment<sup>89</sup>?

Perhaps the most interesting intervention in the Ravenscraig saga was from the Scottish Office. Indeed confirming their portfolio of defending Scotland in London, the Department put in a representation to try to convince British Steel of the merits of choosing Dalzell as the site of its proposed new steel plate mill. By association, this was a strident defence of the Ravenscraig plant as Dalzell would be dependent on it for its steel slabs (the basic 'ingredient' of plated steel). The Scottish Office was worried about job losses at Ravenscraig and Dalzell and complained at the uncooperative nature of British Steel's replies to their questions and requests<sup>90</sup>. However, this representation seems to be of the kind inspired by a somewhat guilty conscience, desperate to appear to be defending Scottish workers, when it was Governmental industrial and privatisation policies that had caused the problems in the first place.

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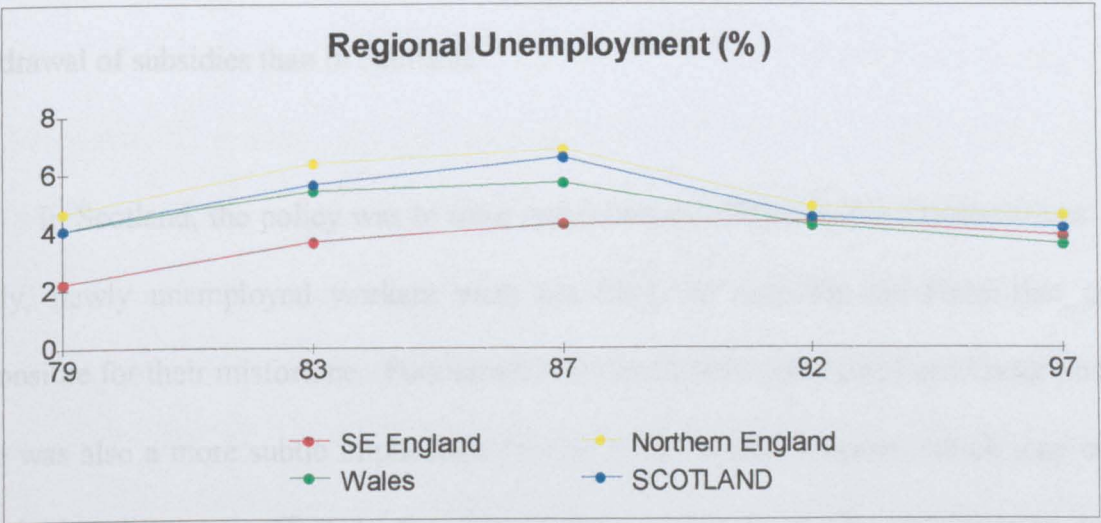
<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p vi.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p viii. Thus we see how a central policy has caused Local Government in Scotland to organise and express opposition.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, pp xi-xiii.



It is a difficult task to try to prove that the withdrawal of Government subsidies caused industrial closures and more unemployment in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. Conservatives would argue that inefficient mismanagement was the primary cause<sup>91</sup>. Indeed, during the course of this discussion, it should be remembered that Scots enjoyed very high *per capita* metropolitan Government spending, even in the 1980s. What can be shown, however, is whether there was a higher correlation between lowering levels of subsidy and increased unemployment in Scotland compared to other regions? Either way, the electorate in Scotland perceived that this was the case and consequently did not support the Government or, importantly, its representatives in Local Government.



4.3 – Source: *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1997, pp15 & 133.*

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

Chart 4.3 shows that, especially during the 1980s, Scotland suffered consistently high levels of unemployment. Scottish respondents, like all others in the rest of the UK, consistently rated unemployment as being the most important issue before the country through the 1980s<sup>92</sup>. Therefore, it seems that the Government should have done more in the 'POMP' to relieve the situation. This becomes especially clear when we see that the only region where there is a significant correlation (at the 1% level) between unemployment and central subsidy levels is Scotland<sup>93</sup>. In the graphical representation of the relationship shown earlier (Chart 4.2), it was possible to see how the employment fortunes of Scotland waxed and waned with the corresponding levels of subsidies. While neither this impression nor the correlation calculations confer definite causation on the dynamic, we can conclude that nowhere else in Britain were levels of unemployment associated so much with the metropolitan Government's systematic withdrawal of subsidies than in Scotland.

In Scotland, the policy was to have two injurious effects on the Conservatives' support. Firstly, newly unemployed workers were not likely to vote for the Party that they held responsible for their misfortune. Furthermore, as David McLetchie and Lord Fraser pointed out, there was also a more subtle implication for the 'POS' in this dynamic, which may eventually have had a disastrous effect on the Conservatives' chances of General Election success in

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<sup>92</sup> Unemployment was seen as the most important problem (scoring between 75%-85%) in Gallup Polls through the 1980s – Gallup Political Indexes, #226, June 1979 onwards (always on pp2-4). The issue scored as highly as 91% in a Scottish poll – *ibid*, #313, September 1986, p18. Unpublished MORI data has the issue consistently above 90% as the most important problem facing Scotland in the 1980s.

<sup>93</sup> The calculations for this point are presented in Appendix B to this chapter.



Scotland<sup>94</sup>. Whilst voters only change their allegiance in General Elections under extreme duress, they are far more easily convinced to register a 'protest vote' at mid-term Local Government Elections. Therefore, many Conservative Councillors lost their seats both north and south of the border as a result of unpopular policies generated in London (see Chart 1.2). As these interviewees pointed out, incumbent local officials are essential for the Party's 'POS' in Scotland. The organisation and direction of General Election campaigns were focused on these local luminaries north of the border<sup>95</sup>. Industrial closures struck at the heart of traditional communities in Scotland. That the Party Leadership did not appreciate the connection demonstrates a lack of sensitivity to peripheral concerns. This thesis measures the General Election dangers to the Party of this trait.

The second unfortunate effect of industrial closures on the 'POS' was the way in which local Party activists reacted. As the Conservatives' popularity in Scotland visibly waned, the 'little platoons' of Party workers were less inclined to work hard for an apparently lost cause<sup>96</sup>. The efforts of local Party workers are essential for the running of a successful election campaign. Furthermore, they are needed especially on the geographical periphery to help to 'sell' new policies to the local electorate<sup>97</sup>. As we have seen, the issue of the sale of Council Housing in Scotland demonstrates the need to have effective local activists to perform this function. Scottish Council tenants were just as prepared to buy their properties as their English counterparts. However, the Conservatives were not able to reap the same political reward as in

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<sup>94</sup> Interviews, 19.1.01 & 5.3.01.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

<sup>96</sup> Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00, Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 & Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

England. This was due, in part, to the absence of local activists to counter opposition denials that the voters' increased standard of living was due to Conservative housing policy. A stream of other metropolitan policies that had been too difficult to defend had driven local Party activists in Scotland from the cause. Perhaps the most notorious of the Conservative policies that had convinced their own members to cease their efforts in Scotland was the Poll Tax.

### ***Thatcherite Neoliberalism and Scotland***

Before we examine that policy, it is necessary to assess how the Thatcher administration was developing in the 1980s with regard to Scotland. It appears that there was a subtle change in the Prime Minister's attitude to territorial management during this time. Even though she believed the issue of Devolution to be dead after the referenda of 1979, Mrs Thatcher's first few years in office still included some concessions to Scottish separateness. As we have seen, the continued presence of non-Thatcherites in the Scottish Office and Parliament contributed to this. Once her position and majority were solidified after the 1983 election, however, she had more confidence and was not concerned that certain policies would offend Scottish voters, who were not likely to vote Conservative anyway<sup>97</sup>. Chapter 2 acknowledged that Thatcherism was not a dramatic departure from stances taken by previous Conservative administrations insofar as it was a programme directed at solving contemporary problems. Nonetheless, her attack on corporatism and state subsidies seemed radical compared with the 1970s and was never going to be popular north of the border.

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

Since the 1930s especially, Conservatives had cited Scottish dependence on the Government in London as a reason for keeping the Union together. In the 1980s, Mrs Thatcher was courting Opposition (including Nationalist) protest by making cuts in British institutions such as nationalised industries, the NHS and comprehensive education. The Nationalists did not seem to appreciate the irony in their vigorous support for these tools of the British state. The Prime Minister was not taking into account the need for administrations in London to be seen to be paying special attention to the needs and desires of people north of the border<sup>99</sup>. It is imperative that the Conservative elite in London is at least seen to appreciate the special needs and desires of the Scots if a reasonable 'POS' situation is to be maintained. This attention must be paid both to the Scottish electorate as a whole, and also to Party workers and Local Government representatives north of the border. In periods of more traditional Unionist administration, such amelioration had been achieved through the 'dual polity' system (see Chapter 2). Hereby, the central Governments were also insulated against issues of 'low politics.'

During the 1980s, however, the Thatcher Governments wanted to take power away from pockets of socialist opposition in Local Government. It was concluded that the best way to do this was to ostensibly place as much power as possible in the hands of the individual voters. Therefore, the move to centralise power was disguised as a populist measure. If decision and funding powers were taken away from Local Authorities in the name of accountability and efficiency, the central Government would pick up the residue. However, the central Government

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<sup>98</sup> Unattributable Interview comment, Winter 2000-2001.

<sup>99</sup> Francis, Martin & Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina (eds.): "The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990", Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1996, p123.

may have been causing unseen problems in local 'POS' in Scotland by building up resentment amongst opposition controlled Local Government in Scotland. This issue is explored more fully in Chapter 5.

An example of successful power centralisation for the Conservatives was the efficient instigation of the NHS and welfare state after the Second World War. According to Mitchell, Mrs Thatcher saw the 1970s as a similar crisis point in British history due to economic stagnation<sup>100</sup>. Thus she was prepared to initiate her policies of centralisation once she was well established in office. The benefits of such neoliberal policies were very evident in the prosperous south. As we saw with regard to housing, the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s were seeking to attract new working class support by widening prosperity and property ownership. However, these economic benefits were not felt in Scotland. Removal of Government subsidy and investment hurt the 'dependent' Scots. Therefore, a 'POMP' move was to blight the 'POS'; for not only were Scots, including Conservatives there, upset at seeing centralisation and removal of local autonomy, they were also suffering financially. A senior source at Conservative Central Office claimed that the change from Union to Unitary had no effect amongst Scottish Conservatives<sup>101</sup>. It is probable that the affluent members of the Party north of the border did not mind, as their incomes were safe and boosted by tax cuts. However, as David Seawright commented, the 1980s saw a significant downturn in grass roots activity for the Party in Scotland<sup>102</sup>. Mrs Thatcher's personality may well have appealed to the collective

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Interview, 21.6.00.

<sup>102</sup> Interview, 13.4.00.

Scottish Conservative psyche<sup>103</sup>. However, such appeal is not enough to sustain local activism if central policies render their efforts futile or are incompatible with any residual Scottish pride/nationalism. The one policy that did most damage to the Conservatives' 'POS' in this case was the introduction of the Community Charge.

### ***The Community Charge***

In Chapter 3, we began to see how this policy inspired Opposition-controlled Local Authorities in Scotland to try to disrupt the 'POMP' as much as possible in order to make gains in the 'POS.' Presently, an analysis of the reasons why the Conservative elite generated and perpetuated the policy further investigate how the Poll Tax caused them electoral problems north of the border. As in the case of the withdrawal of industrial subsidies, the formulation of the Tax seemed to be grounded in sound economic logic and consistent with contemporary Conservative ideology<sup>104</sup>. There would be savings for property-owning potential Conservative voters, the Tax could be promoted as being more equitable than the rating system and Local Authorities would become more accountable to their electors. Thereby, the Conservatives hoped to eliminate local left wing political projects that were currently being funded by the money collected as Domestic Rates. It was the intention of Mrs Thatcher to replace the inequitable Rating system since her time at the Department of the Environment in the 1970s<sup>105</sup>. The resultant Poll Tax, however, turned out to be probably the most unpopular single policy of the

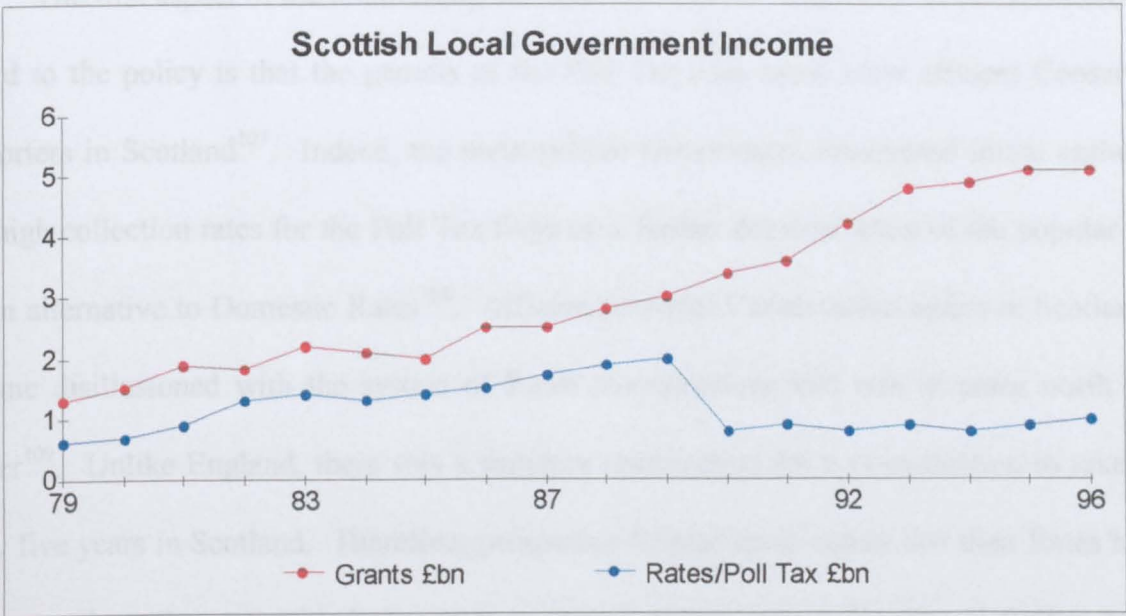
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<sup>103</sup> As suggested in Thatcher, 1993, p622 and Central Office interview, 21.6.00.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Andrew Gamble, 16.3.00.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01. Domestic rates were the most important single issue in the minds of most voters with regard to Local Government in Scotland – Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

Thatcher-Major era. As with Devolution, this episode has been well documented elsewhere. However, there are points that came up in my elite interview programme that demonstrate how the Government felt at the time. From these views, it may be possible to better appreciate the relationship between this aspect of the ‘POMP’ and the Party’s ‘POS’ in Scotland. Most importantly, we should also remember how the ‘POMP’ was causing Conservative Local Government representatives in Scotland to lose their seats or much credibility in their communities.



4.4 – Sources: *The Scottish Abstract of Statistics*<sup>106</sup>.

Following a pattern that very much comes to light in the centre-periphery relationship regarding housing, a hope of the Government was that the Poll Tax would increase central autonomy by reducing the need for subsidy of local services. As Chart 4.4 shows, this hope was

<sup>106</sup> *The Scottish Abstract of Statistics*: Number 14, 1985, p201 - #16, 1987, p183 - #18, 1989, p165 - #21, 1992, p189 - #25, 1996, p269 - #26, 1998, p279.

not realised. At least during the Rates era, levels of subsidy were fairly consistent. Once the Poll Tax was introduced in 1989-1990, these levels began to rise and rose sharply again when its successor, the Council Tax, arrived in 1993-1994. The cost of Poll Tax rebates was not high enough on its own to account for the increase in the central grant bill for Scotland in the 1990s. However, it is obvious that one of the original goals of the Tax, that is to say a reduction in central costs, had not been achieved.

The first aspect of the relationship between the 'POMP' and 'POS' to be considered with regard to the policy is that the genesis of the Poll Tax idea came from affluent Conservative supporters in Scotland<sup>107</sup>. Indeed, the metropolitan Government interpreted initial enthusiasm and high collection rates for the Poll Tax there as a further demonstration of the popular desire for an alternative to Domestic Rates<sup>108</sup>. Affluent potential Conservative voters in Scotland had become disillusioned with the system of Rates re-evaluations that was in place north of the border<sup>109</sup>. Unlike England, there was a statutory requirement for a re-evaluation to take place every five years in Scotland. Therefore, prosperous Conservative voters saw their Rates bills go up frequently as they moved to better areas or gentrified their current locality. A further problem for Conservative supporters in Scotland was that Labour Local Government activists had managed to gain influence with the nominally independent rates assessors in areas such as Fife

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<sup>107</sup> Interviews with David Seawright, 13.4.00, James Mitchell, 8.6.00, Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00, Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00, Viscount Younger, 14.2.01, Lord Fraser, 5.3.01 & Lord Lang, 27.3.01 + Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 5.3.01.

<sup>109</sup> Interviews with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00, Viscount Younger, 14.2.01, Lord Lang, 27.3.01 & Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

and Strathclyde<sup>110</sup>. The Rating system had been very difficult to administer and collect in Scotland<sup>111</sup>. As judicial review north of the border was not flexible enough to reform the *status quo* sufficiently, a completely new system was envisaged. However, devising a replacement was to prove very difficult in practice. Nevertheless, the determination to do so was a good example of the Party elite responding to the wishes of the grass roots in Scotland after William Whitelaw told Conference how bad the situation had become north of the border<sup>112</sup>.

As Secretary of State at the time, it was George Younger's job to sell the resultant new policy to all the voters of Scotland. As Lord Sanderson noted, the Secretary of State had to administer an 'iron fist in a velvet glove'<sup>113</sup>. A tough remedy for the disastrous economic position that had been inherited in 1979 was necessary. However, dramatic policies that deeply affect voters' incomes near to elections are rarely a good idea. Consequently, the new Tax was to 'hole' the administration 'below the water line'<sup>114</sup>. Perhaps the most difficult obstacle was due to the fact that the Tax was being implemented a year earlier in Scotland, as dictated by the *Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987*. This made it look like Scotland was being used as a 'guinea pig'<sup>115</sup>. All my interviewees denied that this was the case. Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish gave the most plausible reasoning<sup>116</sup>. If Scotland was an experimental laboratory, it was quite obvious that the experiment had failed and it would not have been

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> This view was heavily perpetuated in the Scottish media – Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.



continued in England. However, not only was the Tax not being imposed at the same time in England, but also a concurrent Rates re-evaluation was not even being held. Consequently, English Rates were staying low<sup>117</sup>. Thus, it seems rather difficult to defend the position that Scotland was not being treated differently to England. Such a line of questioning would often elicit the response that the Poll Tax was a Scottish idea anyway. Viscount Younger lamented the fact that he did not insist on a concurrent reform of the rating system in England<sup>118</sup>. He is vindicated in this view by the fact that, by 1988, the Government's handling of the Rates question was second only to their NHS reforms in terms of unpopular policies<sup>119</sup>.

The most visible and strongly opposed aspect of the new Tax was that many voters were having to pay something for the first time<sup>120</sup>. Any re-arrangement of the Rating system was going to be a zero-sum situation<sup>121</sup>. There were some in Scotland who benefited. However, those who lost out were more voluble in their protests than the praise for the policy coming from those who had gained. Due to non-payment and, more especially, many exemptions connected with the high proportion of Council House renters north of the border, a large proportion of

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<sup>116</sup> Interview, 25.1.01.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Gallup Political Index, #330, February 1988, p5.

<sup>120</sup> This was the source of most opposition on the national level. A Gallup poll in June 1990 recorded that 49% of respondents were 'very opposed' to the tax. 42% of these thought that it was 'not a fair system.' 26% of these respondents felt that the tax meant that the rich would get richer and the poor, poorer. All these scores were the highest to each question. Gallup Political Index, #358, June 1990, p8. Between July 1987 and November 1992, the range of positive responses to the proposition that the Poll Tax was unfair was between 58%-77% (Gallup Political Index, #387, November 1992, p8). Only about a quarter of respondents thought that the Poll Tax was fairer than the domestic rating system, whilst nearly a half preferred the Council Tax to its predecessor in such terms of equity (ibid).

Scots never had to pay Rates. Under the new system, virtually everybody had to pay some amount. This caused much resentment<sup>122</sup>. Poorer voters did not like having to pay anything and also resented that, by virtue of the costs that they were incurring, their more affluent neighbours were paying less than under the Rating system. Consequently, protests came quickly and vociferously from such disparate quarters as pensioners and student nurses<sup>123</sup>. An unattributable source commented how this initial bad reaction to one of her 'pet' policies in Scotland steered the Prime Minister into refusing any ameliorating measures. Given the small amounts of revenue involved, it would not have been a problem to offer low-income voters 100% rebates on their bills. However, on principle, the Prime Minister refused to do this. Consequently, non-payment and slack collection<sup>124</sup> campaigns began and the Conservatives seemed unlikely to win many votes in Scotland. My source on this point was convinced that the policy could have survived successfully if the 'double blow' of its implementation and refusal to grant 100% rebates had not been delivered. Therefore, we have more evidence of how Mrs Thatcher's personality coupled with an unpopular 'POMP' measure reduced the Party's chances in Scotland. The Party would lose many votes in Local Government Elections as a direct consequence of the tax. Therefore, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate their 'POS' in Scotland would suffer significantly.

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01. On 1.4.89 (p1), the Times reported that 1.2m of those eligible for Poll Tax rebated in Scotland had not applied. Thus, many more voters were 'suffering' under the tax than was necessary.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>124</sup> By 1992, it was estimated that £250m of Poll Tax had not been collected by Opposition party-led Local Authorities in Scotland – Times, 1.5.92, p2.

Loyal Scottish Conservative activists would no longer work hard for what they perceived to be a lost cause. Furthermore, Labour Local Authorities were able to make great play of how they were being forced to reduce services as their incomes dropped due to central policies. II, I 7 (2) of the *Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987* announced that all local services not directly paid for by other sources were now to be financed by the ('personal', 'standard' and 'collective') Community Charges. As we shall further in Chapter 5, the Thatcher Government was very keen to exert control over the activities of pockets of 'town hall socialism' in this way. This imposition of extra central restraint<sup>125</sup> was announced in the 1987 manifesto as a measure intended to "(S)trengthen democratic processes in local authorities"<sup>126</sup>. The democratic credibility argument, which claimed that Local Authorities would become more responsible to their electors if value for money in terms of taxation and services became an issue, was an attempt to mask a more likely inspiration for the policy. By prescribing that Local Government should be more financially responsible, the Prime Minister hoped to take away their option of continuing to run 'loony left' programmes funded by central subsidy. If Councils wished to be well financed, they would have to levy high Poll Tax demands. This would make them unelectable. However, as Viscount Younger noted, this plan somewhat backfired on the Government as astute Labour local politicians in urban Scotland were able to absolve themselves of blame in the eyes of their electors when bills went up and services still suffered<sup>127</sup>. They had sufficient credibility in their communities to successfully argue that there was nothing that could

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<sup>125</sup> Such extra central control was somewhat paradoxical in an administration that claimed to be trying to 'Roll Back the State.'

<sup>126</sup> In: Dale (ed.), 2000, p344.

<sup>127</sup> Interview, 14.2.01 & *Times*, 25.10.88, p12.

be done in the face of a harshly imposed dictate from London. Consequently, the Conservatives' image north of the border was even more deeply wounded.

The Poll Tax was initiated as it was felt that any measure that simplified Local Government finance was worthwhile<sup>128</sup>. The Prime Minister's obstinacy was revealed when even the huge electoral and public order problems associated with the issue did not dissuade her. The campaign to oust Mrs Thatcher concentrated on her perpetuation of such an unpopular policy, thus demonstrating that the Party was more interested in reviving its electoral chances than remaining true to neoliberal principles. Very importantly for this thesis, even Conservative representatives in Local Government<sup>129</sup>, that is to say, those charged with implementing the policy, complained that the policy was too hard to defend<sup>130</sup>. However, the Prime Minister was 'not for turning.'

In the sphere of Local Government, the Conservatives suffered heavy losses of Councillors at the end of the 1980s because of the Poll Tax fiasco. The study of subsequent election results in Chapter 7 of this thesis tests how well this damage could be sustained in Scotland? At the time in question, some of the Party elite acknowledged that Councillors were

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<sup>128</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

<sup>129</sup> Who will usually be more passive and accepting of central directives tolerate more than their (Old) Labour and Liberal counterparts out of deference to the Party Leadership – *ibid*.

<sup>130</sup> This concurs with Rhodes & Marsh's conclusion that the Conservatives suffered not so much from essentially poor policies, but more from ill-considered/inappropriate implementation – Rhodes, R. A. W. & Marsh, David: "Policy Networks in British Government", Oxford, OUP, 1992, p9.

essential for organisation of campaign and policy selling efforts<sup>131</sup>. This opinion was not, however, given much priority when the 'POMP' was being formulated<sup>132</sup>. It is ironic to note that the genesis and impetus for a policy that made the Party vulnerable to accusations of being anti-Scottish and regionally insensitive actually came from north of the border<sup>133</sup>. Thus, it almost appears that whatever the Conservatives did with the 'POMP', they were doomed to failure in Scotland due to the basic pre-dispositions against them amongst society there. Importantly for this thesis, it should be noted that as more Scots felt that the metropolitan Government did not care about them, they felt inclined to look for alternative sources of satisfaction in the political marketplace that is so essential to the concept of the 'POS.' In many instances, this alternative was found in the sphere of Local Government<sup>134</sup>.

The Poll Tax was unpopular with many voters in Scotland who had to endure higher bills. In addition, however, this thesis seeks to promote the importance of a more subtle side effect on the Conservatives' 'POS' north of the border. The policy can be seen as a clear reason for Conservative losses in Local Government representation and a catalyst for concerted campaigns against to the Party from Opposition groups in Scottish Local Authorities<sup>135</sup>. These dynamics are explored further in subsequent chapters. As we have already seen in Chapter 3, the pervasive nature of Local Government in Scottish society rendered the actions of these Opposition agents significantly influential. Therefore, the Poll Tax further jeopardised

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<sup>131</sup> Interviews with David McLetchie, 19.1.01 & Lord Fraser, 5.3.01.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

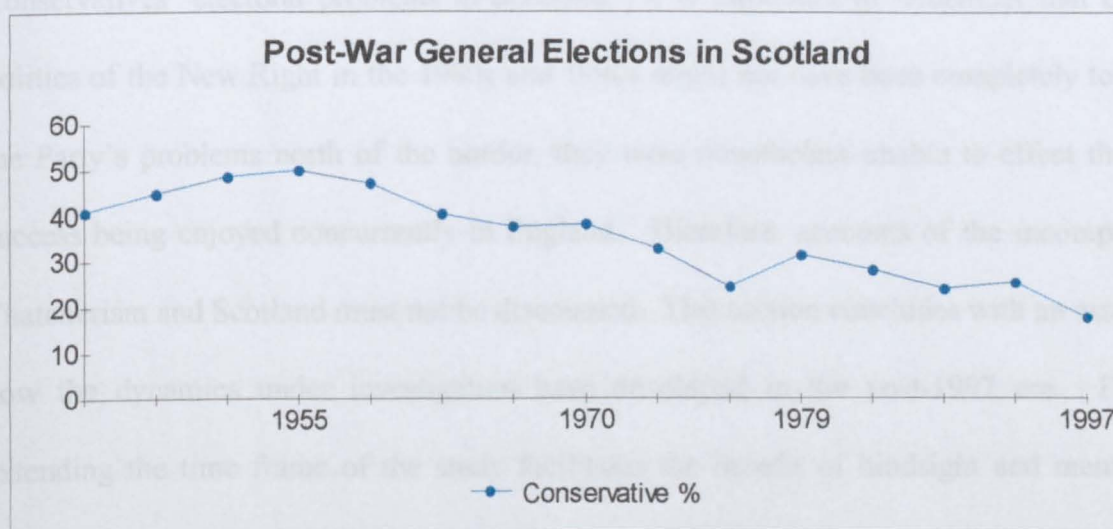
<sup>133</sup> Ibid & interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>134</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

Conservative General Election chances in Scotland by allowing Opposition parties to win more seats in Local Government and use the policy as ‘proof’ for their case that their constituents should reject the Conservatives. Before concluding this chapter, a literature review follows in order to assess further how this thesis’ findings complement existing explanations for the Conservatives’ demise in Scotland.

### ***The Conservative Electoral Demise in Scotland***



4.5 Sources: Kendrick & McCrone, 1989, p589<sup>136</sup>  
 & Butler & Kavanagh: *"The British General Election of..."*<sup>137</sup>.

As can be seen from Chart 4.5, the Party suffered a gradual decline in General Election support north of the border from their zenith in 1955. The major debate in the literature covering this era is whether this regression was inevitable due to the changing social and

<sup>136</sup> Kendrick, Stephen & McCrone, David: *Politics in a Cold Climate: The Conservative Decline in Scotland*, in: *Political Studies*, 1989, XXXVII, pp589-603, p590.

<sup>137</sup> Butler & Kavanagh, 1980, p356; 1984, p301; 1988, p284; 1992, p286 & 1997, p256.

economic structure north of the border since the War, or whether it was caused primarily by the 'POMP' of the 1980s and 1990s?

When presented in graph form, the uniformity of the regression is persuasive *prima facie* evidence for the former argument. Importantly, there seem not to be any radical downturns in the Thatcher-Major years. Indeed, the Party's vote went up in 1992. However, as we shall see in this section, the 'POMP' of the 1980s and 1990s is also often identified as the major cause of the Conservatives' electoral problems in Scotland. It is important to remember that even if the politics of the New Right in the 1980s and 1990s might not have been completely to blame for the Party's problems north of the border, they were nonetheless unable to effect the electoral success being enjoyed concurrently in England. Therefore, accounts of the incompatibility of Thatcherism and Scotland must not be discounted. This section concludes with an assessment of how the dynamics under investigation have developed in the post-1997 era. Fractionally extending the time frame of the study facilitates the benefit of hindsight and mention of the effects of Devolution in the literature being reviewed. The next stage of this section, therefore, is to assess the Conservatives' demise from a long-term perspective, starting with the era of post-war consensus.

### ***Long-Term Decline***

In the middle of the Twentieth Century, Conservative support in Scotland consisted of a wide 'ideological bloc', which included: Protestantism, 'Orangeism', Unionism, British and

Imperial identity and militarism<sup>138</sup>. Proponents of the view that the Conservative demise in Scotland began well before the Thatcher era contend that it was mainly due to the undermining of these traditional establishments by a modernising and secularising world that undid the Party's core support north of the border.

In Scotland, some modifications had to be made to the Conservative Party to appeal to anti-leftist voters. Even in the near aftermath of the Act of Union in 1707, the Tories north of the border seemed to be merely an extension of the English party. This may have suited the hierarchy of the Party in Scotland, who enjoyed the financial, organisational and confidence benefits of being associated with their powerful English counterparts. However, the national pride of many Scottish citizens turned them against the Party. Even the religious affiliation of the Tory Party in Scotland, Episcopalianism, was seen as the 'English Kirk', rather than the preferred Presbyterianism<sup>139</sup>. Therefore, an alternative had to be sought. Towards the end of the Nineteenth Century, 'Unionism' was developed as a solution to this problem. It added some aspects of Liberalism to the elements of Toryism that were acceptable to the Scots. Thus, a stringent anti Home Rule movement began. At this time, Home Rule was dubbed as 'Rome Rule', due to its connections with Irish Catholic dissidence. This new Unionist party appealed to Presbyterians and businessmen in Scotland who feared that Home Rule would threaten their religious and commercial freedoms<sup>140</sup>.

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<sup>138</sup> Kendrick & McCrone, 1989, p595.

<sup>139</sup> Dyer, 2001, p39.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.



Proponents of the longer-term view of the Party's Scottish demise ascribe much credit for the perpetuation of Conservative success earlier in the Twentieth Century in Scotland to continuing Unionist government. David Seawright is such an exponent of the importance of Unionism to the Conservative cause in Scotland<sup>141</sup>. He notes how Unionism developed into an ideology in itself, which prescribed methods of governance for all aspects of the polity and economy. Traditional Unionism called for moderate socio-economic management and intervention. In addition, as witnessed by the circumstances surrounding Unionism's genesis, the distinctive identities of the various regions were to be accommodated as much as possible by the granting of limited administrative Devolution. An important observation by Seawright is that the final slow decline of traditional Unionism (coupled with economic stagnation) north of the border was enough to swing the Scottish electorate away from the Conservative Party<sup>142</sup>. Thus, a long-term issue, rather than some of the infamous policies of the 1980s such as the Poll Tax, may have played the most important role in the Conservatives' electoral decline in Scotland. The question still remains, however, of why and how Unionism died in the British state?

When considering the longer-term explanations of the Conservative decline in Scotland, it should be remembered, as Stein Rokkan and Derek Unwin note, that Unionism had more chance of success in the pre-1970 era<sup>143</sup>. They argue that it was only after that date that the inhabitants of the UK's various regions became acutely aware of their distinctiveness within a multinational state. Before then, it was easier to appeal to a sense of British identity.

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<sup>141</sup> Seawright, 1999, p158.

<sup>142</sup> Seawright & Curtice, 1995, p332.

<sup>143</sup> Rokkan & Unwin, 1983, p68.

Michael Dyer traces the onset of the demise of Scottish Conservatism to the mid-1950s, when the existing influential centre-right coalition fragmented into the Conservative, Liberal and Scottish Nationalist Parties. As we have seen, this coalition had emerged as a reaction to perceived leftist threats in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries<sup>144</sup>. It broke up due to its failure to renew and modernise in the post-war years<sup>145</sup>. Labour, on the other hand, were astute enough to quickly leave behind the wartime domestic party political truce and re-engage in [the 'POS' and] electioneering<sup>146</sup>. It is interesting to note, as Dyer does, that the Conservatives in England did modernise to a certain degree in the post war era. Their Unionist counterparts in Scotland, on the other hand, were culpable for not doing so simultaneously<sup>147</sup>.

Dyer also notes that there only seemed to be minimal Scottish involvement in modern Conservatism after the major re-organisation of the Party undertaken in the mid-1960s<sup>148</sup>. From 1912-1965, the word 'Conservative' had not been used in the Party name north of the border in order to distance the Scottish Party from London and promote Unionism, rather than (English) Conservatism, as the main cause of the organisation. This approach sought to win more support amongst the Scottish general electorate and Party members alike<sup>149</sup>. The scheme worked with the voters and gave Scottish Conservatives a sense of quasi-autonomy and associated confidence. As examined especially in Chapter 2 of this thesis, once they were fully re-integrated into the

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<sup>144</sup> Dyer, 2001, p39.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p31.

<sup>146</sup> Ramsden, John: "The Age of Churchill and Eden, 1940-1957", London, Longman, 1995, pp55-56.

<sup>147</sup> Dyer, 2001, p46.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p31.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with David Seawright, 16.4.00.

UK-wide organisation in the 1960s, however, not only was this confidence lost, but the influence of Scottish Conservatism was also somewhat diluted.

Throughout this thesis, we hear from Local Councillors and Party Archive sources that the remaining Conservatives in Scotland have felt somewhat ignored by the Party elite in London. Consequently, essential local information has not always been communicated or assimilated and local Party activists have not been inclined to give their best efforts. Consequently, the Conservatives' 'POS' in Scotland has been compromised. John Ramsden notes how Scottish Conservatives were beginning to feel isolated and ignored by the central Governments in London in the 1950s and 1960s<sup>150</sup>. The opinion that this problem pre-dated the Thatcher era again lends more credence to the long-term account of the Scottish Conservative decline.

Richard Rose presents another example of a relevant issue that began before the 1980s<sup>151</sup>. He notes the problems inherent to ignoring the multinational nature of the UK and denying the Scots a sense of distinctiveness. Ramsden makes more specific points along these lines. He identifies an apparent over-concentration on the governance of the South East of England by the Conservatives as early as the 1960s<sup>152</sup>. This is an accusation often levelled at the Thatcher-Major administrations, as examined in this chapter. In this instance, however, it is interesting to note again that the trend may have started before 1979.

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<sup>150</sup> Ramsden, John: "The Winds of Change: Macmillan to Heath, 1957-1975", Longman, London, 1996, p135.

<sup>151</sup> Rose, Richard: "Politics in England Today", London, Faber & Faber, 1974, p34.

Kendrick and McCrone present another argument that suggests that the Conservative decline in Scotland may have started before 1979. However, they do not believe that the demise was as natural or inevitable as writers such as Rose or Dyer suggest. Kendrick and McCrone agree that the end of the post-war consensus precipitated the downfall of the Conservatives north of the border. However, rather than blaming changes in modern Scottish culture, they identify long-term central economic policy as the main reason for the swing to the centre-left north of the border. Kendrick and McCrone argue that Scottish voting habits changed drastically when it was perceived that Scotland had diverged from England in terms of priority of economic management from the 1960s<sup>153</sup>. Labour and the Conservatives had, since the end of the War, tried to ensure low unemployment and inflation, economic growth, a mixed economy, the welfare state and Keynesianism. They had sought these goals through different means, but there seemed to be agreement on what constituted optimum economic targets. The voters had to choose who they felt were best able to achieve these aims. This consensus extended to the Scottish polity. Once Governments and voters began to see Scotland as a separate economic entity, however, this sense of unity could not be preserved. As such ties to the Union broke down north of the border, the Conservatives were bound to lose votes.

Another example of the long-term view is that of A. J. Davies. He notes how the simultaneous demise of Protestantism and manual labour in Scotland seriously diminished the

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<sup>152</sup> Ramsden, 1996, p251.

<sup>153</sup> Kendrick and McCrone, 1989, p597.

Conservatives' support there<sup>154</sup>. This development started before 1979 and, especially in the case of secularisation, there was little the Governments of the 1980s or 1990s could have done to arrest the situation through the 'POMP.' Orangeism (a formerly important source of votes for the Scottish Conservatives, as it had brought in supporters from disparate social backgrounds) was bound to diminish in importance once the rate of Irish immigration into the urban West of Scotland fell<sup>155</sup> and society in general secularised.

Whilst assessing these various examples of a longer-term decline of Scottish Conservatism, it is interesting to note that a version of this argument is presented in the Thatcher memoirs<sup>156</sup>. It is unsurprising that the former Prime Minister does not blame her policies or personality for the Party's electoral problems in Scotland. Furthermore, that she cites the longer-term reasons does not necessarily lend them more credence. Nonetheless, like the Conservative elite's perceptions of the Scottish economy, these opinions on the nature of society north of the border could have influenced the contemporary 'POMP.' All the interviewees cited in this chapter strenuously denied that the Party ever gave up Scotland as a hostile lost cause in the 1980s and 1990s. However, if the leadership was permeated with a belief that Scottish society's structure was inevitably changing against their favour, it seems likely that they would have put more effort into securing territories more suited to their outlook; such as the new working class Conservative voters of the South East of England.

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<sup>154</sup> Davies, A. J.: "We the Nation. The Conservative Party and the Pursuit of Power", London, Little, Brown & Co., 1995, p145.

<sup>155</sup> Dyer, 2001, p41.

As we shall see later in this literature review, many sources trace the decline of Scottish Conservatism almost exclusively to the Thatcher era. Given the evidence presented by Dyer and others, however, it is worth considering the proposition that the undoing of the Party in Scotland started before 1979. That the downward curve presented in Chart 4.5 takes no dramatic shifts in the latter years of the Twentieth Century suggests that the Party fared no better or worse than expected, in spite of the apparently radical impact of the politics of the New Right in Scotland.

The long-term explanation of the Party's demise in Scotland raises many important points. There are two main deficiencies, however. Firstly, to conclude that most of the Conservatives' demise in Scotland was caused merely by the 'passage of time'<sup>157</sup> seems to oversimplify what seems to have been a complex interaction of social and party political factors. Furthermore, to understate the effect of Thatcherism on Scotland may be a serious omission, as the rest of this thesis seeks to assess. During the 1980s, the Conservative vote in England rose, but the opposite occurred north of the border. With especial reference to this work, therefore, why the 'POMP' of the Thatcher-Major era was not able to arrest the demise of the Party in Scotland (or, indeed, how it may have compounded it) would seem to need more examination than the inevitable dialectic view offered by proponents of the long-term explanation.

### ***Short-Term Decline***

The other main argument in the literature on the Conservatives' electoral demise in Scotland places much more blame on the 'POMP' of the 1980s and 1990s. Of the specific

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<sup>156</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p619.

policy areas that caused the Conservatives the most problems in Scotland in that era, many writers cite Devolution as having been most damaging. This is an interesting case, as the issue had been contentious well before 1979. Other frequently mentioned aspects of 1979-1997 'POMP' that are identified as having lost the Conservatives votes in Scotland include the Poll Tax and the withdrawal of industrial subsidies. The specific policies and issues have all been studied in this chapter. It is the purpose of this section to establish the legitimacy of these matters in current explanations for the Conservatives' decline in Scotland.

Despite Mrs Thatcher's protestations that she was always most keen on the preservation of the Union<sup>158</sup>, many Scottish Conservative MPs saw the unitary code being employed in the 1980s as putting too much strain on the Union and consequently further damaging the Conservative vote in Scotland<sup>159</sup>. Therefore, whilst the decline of Unionism might be recognised as a long-term problem, it may have been a more immediate issue, the adoption of neoliberal unitary strategies, that administered a fatal blow to it. 'Territorial Management' is an appropriate collective term for these principles and policies when applied to Scotland. Territorial management is included in the 'POMP', when consideration is given as to how a policy might be received in the various regions when it is under formulation; and also in the 'POS', when deciding how best to sell and/or defend a policy away from London. As we have seen in this chapter, Mrs Thatcher took heed of these territorial management dynamics when making policy. The major question for this section, therefore, is whether her apparently radical

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<sup>157</sup> Dyer, 2001, p33.

<sup>158</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p624.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with David Seawright, 16.4.00.

territorial management strategy significantly damaged the Party's electoral chances north of the border?

Writers from different ideological backgrounds all identify the Conservative territorial management strategy in the 1980s as having been a major contributor to problems in elections in Scotland. Anthony Birch presents an example of this view. He notes the differences in culture between England and Scotland<sup>160</sup>. This issue would seem to fit into the list of longer-term problems. However, many argue that it was the unitary approach adopted in the 1980s that finally turned Scottish national identity into an electoral problem for the Conservatives. Birch concludes that Governments of all parties in the era of post-war consensus best managed these differences in culture and society. As noted earlier, this was achieved by appealing to Scots' sense of British identity, yet still acceding to Scottish national pride by allowing some autonomy through Local Government and somewhat separate administration by the Scottish Office. Thereby, the unitary approach of the 1980s is condemned for its lack of regional sensitivity.

The consensus of opinion in the literature is that traditional Unionist territorial management strategies, which allowed Scotland a fair degree of administrative autonomy and preferential economic support, helped significantly to preserve Conservative support north of the border. As we have seen in this chapter, when a stricter unitary code and New Right commitment to a market economy in the 1980s replaced this strategy, the national pride and financial fortunes of many Scottish voters were damaged. These downturns were blamed on the

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<sup>160</sup> Birch, 1993, pp5-10, 81 & 269.



contemporary 'POMP' rather than a natural long-term decline. Electoral problems for the Conservatives at all levels in Scotland were an inevitable result.

Examples of this analysis appear frequently in the works of writers who examine the nationalist perspective. James Kellas asserts that most Scots are very proud of their distinctive identity<sup>161</sup>. When the economic fortunes of Scotland did not mirror those of England in the 1980s, the removal of regional preferential economic treatment by the unitary administration in London was blamed and simultaneously labelled 'anti-Scottish.' This issue has been examined in greater depth in this chapter. James Mitchell also identifies regional insensitivity by the Conservatives of the 1980s as having been a recent and significant cause of their electoral demise north of the border<sup>162</sup>.

Michael Lynch notes another apparent affront to Scottish national pride that seemed to lose the Conservatives votes in the 1980s<sup>163</sup>. As examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the presence of the Secretary of State for Scotland, Scottish Office and special Parliamentary arrangements for Scottish matters in London satisfied many voters north of the border that their interests were being adequately defended. The sense of quasi-autonomy afforded by these institutions and separate legal, educational and ecclesiastical and, importantly, Local Government, institutions in Scotland had been sufficient to satisfy residual Scottish national pride in the Unionist era. From the 1980s onwards, however, it seemed that St Andrew's House

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<sup>161</sup> Kellas, 1989, p124.

<sup>162</sup> Mitchell, 1996, p48.

<sup>163</sup> Lynch, Michael: "Scotland. A New History", London, Pimlico, 1991, p448.

could have been merely a conduit for Downing Street directives<sup>164</sup>. Thus, another aspect of Thatcherite territorial management may indeed have caused immediate problems for the Party at the polls north of the border. Michael Keating also notes how the Scottish Office had an important role to play in the preservation of national pride even if its powers were only in fact nominal<sup>165</sup>. Its seeming downgrading in the Thatcher era was thus a potential threat to Scotland that was not going to be popular with the electorate there.

Lindsay Paterson reports how, after the departure of Mrs Thatcher, the Conservatives in London realised how some of the centralising tendencies of the 1980s had harmed them in Scottish elections<sup>166</sup>. As we saw in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the Major administration tried to re-assert some Scottish confidence through reverting to more traditional Unionist territorial management strategies. The promotion of the Scottish Office as the most able protector of Scottish interests in Chapter 4 of *Cm 2225 – Scotland in the Union – a Partnership for Good* (1993) is a good example of the re-vitalised Unionist rhetoric of this era. As we saw in Chart 4.5, the Conservatives' vote went up in Scotland in 1992, when the Party's General Election campaign focused heavily on Unionist principles.

As Brown *et al* note, it seemed that the Conservatives of the 1980s had become out of touch with what Scottish voters needed and wanted<sup>167</sup>. In some ways, this lends credence to the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Keating, 1988, p129.

<sup>166</sup> Paterson, Lindsay: "The Autonomy of Modern Scotland", Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1994, p171.

<sup>167</sup> Brown *et al*, 1996, pp105-106 & 1999, p5.

longer-term hypothesis of the Party demise in Scotland, as perhaps society had modernised north of the border to an extent that could not be accommodated by traditional Conservative territorial management strategies. However, we have already seen in this thesis how pragmatism and sceptical reductionism have dominated Conservative thinking. Therefore, that the Party did not adapt to contemporary circumstances in Scotland could be more of an error in judgement when formulating policies and territorial management strategies in the 1980s and 1990s than an unavoidable result of changes in society beyond their control.

Some assessments of the 1980s and 1990s from the liberal and conservative traditions also see the 'POMP' of that era as having been a more important cause of the Conservatives' losses in Scotland than any long-term natural decline. Jonathan Bradbury<sup>168</sup> and Jim Bulpitt<sup>169</sup> make reference to the change in Conservative territorial management strategy after 1979 as having contributed to the increased divergence in electoral success for the Party in Scotland compared to the rest of the United Kingdom.

Bradbury, like Kellas, notes how it was inappropriate to try to extend the market-based policies of the New Right to the struggling economy of Scotland. These policies were unlikely to bring a 'feel good factor' to the Scottish electorate, as will be discussed with reference to the work of David Sanders below. Furthermore, their imposition was an unpopular reversal of the more traditional system of regionally sensitive economic preferences. Bulpitt makes the point that the centralisation preferred by the Thatcher administration was an affront to the voters and

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<sup>168</sup> Bradbury, 1997, p74.

Conservative Party members in Scotland. The more traditional Unionist style of territorial management allowed for Party agents on the geographical periphery to be allowed considerable autonomy in running local affairs. Once this system was changed in favour of more central control, the Party elite in London was susceptible to accusations of governing in the style of an 'absentee landlord.' That the Conservatives had few MPs north of the border at that time also brought their mandate to govern into question, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Thus, a contemporary decision in the 'POMP' of the 1980s brought electoral problems in Scotland for the Conservatives by awakening long-term animosities that had previously been ameliorated by traditional Unionist territorial management strategies.

Whilst giving much attention to the longer-term arguments, Seawright and Curtice acknowledge that some of the troublesome issues readily associated with the Thatcher era did lose the Conservatives votes in Scotland<sup>170</sup>. One important conclusion of theirs is that if the Thatcher or Major Governments had been able to bring economic success to Scotland, then the Party would have fared much better<sup>171</sup>. This idea conforms to the opinions of David Sanders. He proposes that central Governments are best advised to dispense essential bitter economic policies early in the term of a Parliament<sup>172</sup>. Such unpalatable measures often cause 'mid-term blues', an important symptom of which can be the loss of Local Government representation in mid-term elections. Central administrations should then be able to recover for the next General Election by reflatting the nation's economy and the citizens' sense of well being with some

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<sup>169</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick & Rose (eds.), 1982, p166.

<sup>170</sup> Seawright, & Curtice, 1995, p324.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, pp325-329.

astutely timed tax or interest rate cuts. Such a programme of policies, timed to bring the least electoral harm/most electoral benefits, would comply with Jim Bulpitt's notion of a successful 'statecraft cycle'<sup>173</sup>.

As this thesis examines, such tactics seemed to do well for the Conservatives in affluent England. However, as they did not enjoy the benefits of the 1980s economic boom, not only did Scottish voters remove many Conservatives from Local Government in mid-term, but were also harder to persuade to vote for the Party at the next General Election. This thesis argues that the removal from office of many Scottish Conservative Councillors made the vital 'POS' functions of re-attaching dissident voters and winning new support very difficult north of the border.

It is important to note at this point that opinions on the effect of Thatcherism on the Scottish electorate have changed somewhat with hindsight. As we saw in Chapter 2, when Mrs Thatcher came to power, she was generally perceived to be a radical atypical Party leader. With time, however, this opinion was widely reconstructed to the point of acknowledging that, in spite of some innovative policies, she was quite a typical pragmatic Conservative leader. The same sort of dynamic seems to appear in assessments of the effect of Thatcherism on Scotland. As events were transpiring, it appeared as though the Conservatives' 'POS' in Scotland was suffering significant damage due to the new Prime Minister. The electoral data presented in Chart 4.5 has caused some re-appraisal of this view and the re-invigoration of the long-term explanations reviewed above. However, the frequency with which the Party elite's economic

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<sup>172</sup> Sanders, 1991, pp236 & 236n.

policies and apparent overly-English image are still cited as definite vote losers in the 1980s and 1990s render this short-term view still highly relevant and worthy of examination. A brief review of post-Devolution opinions of Central-Local Government relations in Scotland now follows in order to assess further the importance of these dynamics in Conservative politics north of the border.

### ***Post Devolution Opinions***

Even though they lost all their MPs in Scotland in 1997, the Conservatives retained 8.8% of Councillors and won 19/129 seats in the new devolved Parliament. Therefore, a new aspect of Central-Local relations is emerging north of the border that is closely connected with the issues dealt with in this thesis. James Mitchell highlights the most important points<sup>174</sup>. He notes that Devolution, as formalised in the *Scotland Act 1998*, represents constitutional radicalism. However, there are two factors that seem to suggest that the actual changes effected might not be so momentous as first envisioned.

We see throughout this thesis that over-centralisation has damaged Conservative electoral chances north of the border. As both the long and short-term explanations examined above suggest, appearing to be a distant 'absentee landlord' in London that seemed to want to draw more and more power to the centre ensured distrust for the Party on the geographical periphery. This problem originated almost immediately after the Act of Union in 1707. Nationalists have cited it as the prime root of their cause throughout the Twentieth Century. In

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<sup>173</sup> Bulpitt, 1986, p21.

the short term, the problem seemed to be at its most acute during the Thatcher era, as witnessed by the Major administrations' efforts to pacify Scotland through the restoration of limited decentralisation. It would seem that Devolution should have fixed this problem. However, it is possible that the process may have just transferred power from one metropolitan centre (London) to another (Edinburgh). Thus, many Scottish citizens and local politicians may still feel somewhat disenfranchised. Somewhat ironically, such complaints are now beginning to emanate from Conservative communities who feel that the Labour Executive in Edinburgh is too distant and uncaring<sup>175</sup>.

It is too early in the life of the Scottish Parliament to conclude on how these new problems are going to be solved. However, the second point made by Mitchell has definite resonance for this thesis. He notes that it is very important to assess whether reform of the informal institutions and relationships in Scottish politics will accompany the constitutional changes of Devolution<sup>176</sup>? With regard to this work, it will be very interesting to note how the role of Local Councillors in Scotland will be affected by the advent of the new Parliament and Executive. We are seeing how Councillors have played an important role north of the border in marshalling support for their parties and representing their communities against the Governments in London. It remains to be seen whether MSPs will replace Councillors as important local luminaries. An interesting dynamic herein is whether voters know whether to approach their Councillor or MSP with a particular problem? In this thesis, we see how such

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<sup>174</sup> In: Hay, Colin (ed.): "British Politics Today", Polity Press, Cambridge, 2002, p237.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>176</sup> In: Hay (ed.), 2002, p255.

contact has facilitated extended influence for Councillors in the past (especially with regard to Local Authority housing). If MSPs begin to poach such gratitude for help in matters that are not really in their remit, the balance of political influence in Scotland could change. As Appendices C and D to this chapter show, the separation of powers between Local Authorities and the Scottish Parliament is not always entirely clear. Therefore, the potential for voters going to the wrong representative is high.

Similarly, it seems that the relationship between Local Authorities and the Executive has yet to stabilise<sup>177</sup>. Edinburgh has almost certainly replaced London as the focus of political power in Scotland. The situation is still somewhat in flux. However, it seems that there is potential for significant encroachment of Councils' powers by Holyrood. Another interesting issue in this respect is the way in which the Scottish Parliament delegates functions and powers back to Local Authorities, as is its right. Whilst the MSPs may feel that they are reducing their own burden, it is interesting to consider the possibility that they might thereby also be surrendering political influence back to the Councillors. The Parliament does place many such burdens on Councils, such as responsibility for education. As much of the funding for these policies is 'ring fenced' by the Executive, significant control is thus exerted over the Local Authorities. This confirms the opinion expressed by Bennett *et al* that the Executive is beginning to be viewed with more suspicion by Local Councillors of all parties than is the Parliament itself<sup>178</sup>.

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<sup>177</sup> Bennett, Michael, Fairley, John & McAteer, Mark: *Devolution in Scotland: The impact on local government*, on [www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/government](http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/government)

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.



While relations between Scottish Local Government and the new Executive in Edinburgh are thus sometimes strained, they are still thought to be better than when Local Authorities north of the border had to deal with St. Andrew's House. It now seems that Edinburgh, rather than central Government in London, is the centre of administration. This improves the Executive's mandate and credibility, but does not completely remove all antagonism between the various levels of government; as witnessed by some frustration being felt by Scottish Local Authorities in their dealings with the newly-expanded Civil Service centred on Edinburgh.

It cannot be argued that the institution of the new Parliament has made bureaucracy north of the border any more straightforward. As Bennett *et al* note, Scottish Local Authorities still have to deal with many different departments in Edinburgh<sup>179</sup>. Many of these departments seem to be of the opinion that Local Authorities are not always able to administer public services adequately. The counter argument put forward by the Executive and Civil Service in Scotland is that even though central control of service provision might thus have actually increased since Devolution, this was necessary if standards were to be maintained. This situation may even be more complicated than its predecessor; which saw the Scottish Office play a fairly all-encompassing role. Nevertheless, Local Authorities in Scotland now have to interact with a new political centre. It will be interesting to see whether the Conservatives can use this new situation to their advantage. To conclude this literature review and establish where this thesis might fit into the canon, a summary of the long and short-term views of the Scottish Conservatives' decline follows.

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

## ***Summary***

The body of academic literature on the Conservative decline in Scotland that blames Thatcherite measures in the 'POMP' has contributed to the topics and associated interview questions that are addressed in this chapter. As we have seen, some of these measures were very unpopular in Scotland and lost the Party votes in General and Local Government Elections there. As this thesis seeks to demonstrate, the latter was especially harmful for the Conservatives' 'POS' north of the border. Therefore, even though Scottish incompatibility with these policies may have been caused by long-term social structures north of the border, it was the policies, rather than the structures that could have been causing the Conservatives most problems at the polls in Scotland. Nonetheless, the evidence presented in Chart 4.5 is still most compelling. The Conservatives' demise in Scotland has been steady since 1955, with little statistical evidence that the Thatcher-Major era was any worse than expected. Therefore, there are two points that should be made to conclude this section and show how this thesis hopes to complement the existing body of literature.

Firstly, it does seem clear that the Conservative decline in Scotland began before 1979 and has been precipitated by society structural factors since the 1950s. This thesis seeks to promote the extra 'POS' importance of Conservative Local Councillors in this structure. However, even steady declines usually feature noteworthy points. Therefore, it is still worth studying the unpopular policies of the 1980s and 1990s. Thereby, it is possible to assess why and how the structure and attitudes of Scottish society did not allow the Conservatives' demise north of the border to be arrested or reversed by the 'POMP' that was popular elsewhere. There

have been many studies of the unpopularity of the Thatcherite 'POMP.' This thesis hopes to compliment this canon by highlighting some currently undervalued 'side effects' of these policies and the nature of the society into which they were introduced. If the hypothesis can be adequately supported, the effects of the 'POMP' in the 1980s and 1990s on Conservative Local Government representation in Scotland should acquire more significance. If it was indeed very difficult for the Party to recover in General Elections north of the border following Local Government Election losses, then more attention should be given to the aspects of the 'POMP' that caused mid-term protest votes and inspired Opposition party Councillors to mount concerted protests against the central Government. Furthermore, the nature of the Scottish political culture that renders Local Government representation so important north of the border should also assume more significance.

## ***Conclusion***

Having explored the 'POMP' based reasons for the Conservative demise in Scotland, we are finally left with the task of trying to identify which, if any, had the most disastrous effect on the Party's 'POS?' Furthermore, could any of the problems have been alleviated with more regionally sensitive 'POMP?' Constructing an empirical framework for the first question has not been straightforward. For example, how does one quantify the impact of Mrs Thatcher's personality on the Party's popularity? Opinion polls that have asked this question are prone to sampling error and can only extract subjective replies. Furthermore, we are still left with the question of whether this variable would have been considered to be so important if other, for example, economic, policies had been benefiting Scots as much as their English neighbours?

Nonetheless, consistent opinion poll data and the frequency with which this issue was raised by my interviewees supports the proposition that the Prime Minister’s personality and image were very important factors in the build-up of antipathy towards the Conservatives in Scotland.

Lord Lang put forward a plausible case that the Conservative demise in Scotland was mainly due to an accumulation of animosity towards the Party, rather than one specific policy<sup>180</sup>. The (%) opinion poll data in Table 4.6 seems to substantiate this point to a degree. The question before the respondents was ‘Which of these do you think has been the most important reason for the Conservatives’ decline in Scotland?’ The top three possible answers in Table 4.6 help to put the examples in this chapter into better perspective.

	<b>MOST IMPORTANT (%)</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> MOST IMPORTANT (%)</b>
The Conservatives are a mainly English party, which governs Scotland in England's interests	31	22
The Conservatives are too much in favour of things like privatisation, private enterprise and market forces	29	24
The Scottish economy has done badly under the Conservatives	16	18
The Conservative are opposed to giving he Scots any form of self-government	8	16
None of these reasons	3	4
Don't know	12	15

4.6 – Source: *Gallup Political & Economic Index*, #429, May 1996, p8.

<sup>180</sup> Interview, 27.3.01.

We can see that the Party's image in Scotland was still severely tarnished by the pro-English aura of Mrs Thatcher. What is perhaps more interesting, though, is that the second and third most popular replies could have been directly addressed through the 'POMP', and yet, were not. Mrs Thatcher did not seem to understand or engage in the territorial aspect of governing the UK. Her successor was resented less north of the border because he seemed to realise that Scottish esteem had to be protected. Examples of such sensitive 'POMP' included the holding of EU conferences in Edinburgh and the return of the Stone of Destiny. It seems that these measures came too late to save the Party in Scotland<sup>181</sup>.

Perhaps the Poll Tax is the most potent example of a specific Thatcherite policy causing problems in the Scottish 'POS.' This is because it added most to the Scots' perception that the Conservative elite was more concerned with the governance of England and did not have the interests of 'ordinary people'<sup>182</sup> at heart. The Tax also caused many Conservative Councillors to lose office and gave their Opposition replacements considerable material with which to attack the central Government. Mrs Thatcher's retrospective attempt to shift the blame onto the Scots who called for reformation of the domestic rating system and 'their' leaders such as Malcolm Rifkind seems merely to be a way of avoiding embarrassment<sup>183</sup>. According to Gamble, it was

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<sup>181</sup> Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

<sup>182</sup> A phrase used frequently in appropriate Gallup polls; confirmed by Keith Harding – Interview, 12.9.01. The Scottish Conservatives knew that this perception had to be changed, but that this would not be easy to do if the Government in London was keen to perpetuate the policies that were causing the problems.

<sup>183</sup> As in: Thatcher, 1993, p652; Cole, John: "As It Seemed to Me. Political Memoirs", London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995, p315 & Lloyd, T. O.: "Empire, Welfare State, Europe. English History 1906-1992. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.", Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp512-513.

embarrassment that the Scottish Conservatives were feeling during the 1980s<sup>184</sup>. They were proud and determined to maintain their Unionist credentials. This linked them with the Conservatives in London. To all other Scots during the 1980s especially, this was a link that was far from desirable.

It should be re-iterated here that many policies that formed the Thatcherite canon were pragmatic responses to economic problems, rather than dogmatic adherence to any particular philosophy. However, it seems rather clear that it was usually English economic problems that were being solved. Gamble asserted that the Thatcher administration never got to grips with the way in which the disparate coalition of Conservatives and Unionists in Scotland had to be held together; a task that required more ‘politicking’ than just facing the substantial economic problems of Scotland. The old style grandees of the Party were still influential in 1979. Therefore, the first step to be taken was to install some Thatcherites to positions of power in the Scottish Party. Michael Forsyth was one such placement. However, the potential problems for the ‘POS’ are obvious if the local leadership is looking askance at the central elite, whilst still caught in economic turmoil. For example, Mitchell mentioned that the Scottish elite realised that there was not much point in trying to take on the Labour Party in Scotland in the same way as Thatcherism had won the hearts (through the wallets) of ‘Essex man.’

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<sup>184</sup> Interview, 16.3.00.

Another problem with the Scottish Conservative leadership that was identified by Seawright and Mitchell was a sense of complacency that pervaded their thinking<sup>185</sup>. The fact that Conservative strongholds in Scotland still needed defending was ignored. With Labour concentrating their efforts in Scotland as the only chance of success, such complacency was very dangerous. Most importantly, as Seawright and Lords Fraser and Lang noted, the Party members and Local Government representatives in Scotland did not feel inclined to work for a Party with a stagnant local leadership and seemingly uncaring distant elite in London<sup>186</sup>.

The aim of this chapter was to explore the strained relationship between London and Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s. A more specific objective was to assess the link between Conservative 'POMP' and 'POS' during this time. By virtue of the elite interview material utilised, extended perception of this dynamic may be derived; as we have seen what the administrations perceived to be the problem. As noted, these perceptions were not always accurate. The 'POMP' was driven by a mixture of these perceptions and increasing levels of dogma. These policies proved to be incompatible with what was traditionally popular with the Scottish electorate. Furthermore, the seemingly excessive focus on satisfying English tax-paying voters meant that it is hardly surprising that Conservative 'POS' was failing north of the border. Most importantly for this thesis, we have noted the extra strain put upon Conservative Local Councillors and Party members in Scotland. The succession of policies emanating from London was putting them in an increasingly untenable situation. The 'POS' consequences of this dynamic are key to the hypothesis in this work.

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<sup>185</sup> Interviews, 13.4.00 & 8.6.00.

Through the course of this current chapter, we have examined some of the Governmental policies and attitudes that may have further soured their image in the eyes of many Scottish voters. Given this evident natural pre-disposition of the Scots against the Party, the Conservative administrations of the 1980s and 1990s would have had to have formulated some extremely popular measures in the 'POMP' in order to overcome this deficiency in the 'POS.' As we have seen with regard to housing policy, Labour Local Authorities in Scotland could undermine even such ostensibly popular measures.

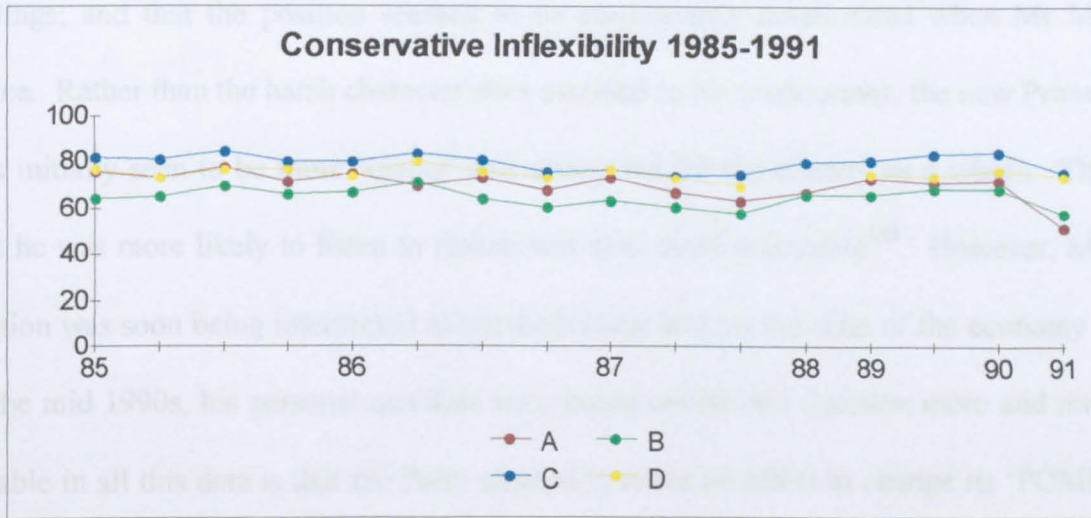
Previous studies of the policies mentioned above have all linked them with the Conservatives' electoral demise in Scotland through a basic function. That is to say, that voters were unlikely to support a party that they perceived to be anti-Scottish, culpable for the running down of heavy industry and instigators of the widely unpopular Poll Tax. However, I feel that a very damaging impact of these policies has been undervalued. This thesis seeks to emphasise that significant danger for General Elections was caused by the damage being done to Conservative Local Government representation and, consequently, organisation in Scotland. The contemporary 'POMP' was undermining an agency that was key to the Party's 'POS' north of the border. As we have seen, the Thatcherite 'Rolling Back the State' programme caused much friction with Local Government in Scotland. Chapter 5 will focus on this aspect of the 'POMP' to demonstrate how disaffected Local Authorities in Scotland could effectively undermine the Conservatives' 'POS' in their region.

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<sup>186</sup> Interviews, 13.4.00, 5.3.01 & 27.3.01.



## Appendix A



4.7 – Source: *Gallup Political Index*<sup>187</sup>.

### LEGEND:

A = Agreement with the proposition that ‘the Conservatives are too rigid and inflexible’

B = “ “ “ “ ‘the Conservatives don’t care what hardships their policies cause’

C = “ “ “ “ ‘the Tories want to cut back too much on health, education and other services’

D = “ “ “ “ ‘causing unemployment to rise is not an acceptable way to deal with inflation’

<sup>187</sup> *Gallup Political Index*: Number 296, April 1985, p7, #300, August 1985, p7, #302, October 1985, p10, #305, January 1986, p8, #308, April 1986, p8, #311, July 1986, p7, #314, October 1986, p9, #317, January 1987, p7, #320, April 1987, p10, #326, October 1987, p9, #338, October 1988, p8, #344, April 1989, p10, #310, September 1989, p9, #361, September 1990, p8 & #374, October 1991, p33.

Two interesting points from this analysis are that, as with the propositions about Mrs Thatcher's image, the questions have been generated by estimations of contemporary public feelings; and that the position seemed to be considerably ameliorated when Mr Major took office. Rather than the harsh characteristics ascribed to his predecessor, the new Prime Minister was initially seen to be more 'caring' and concerned for the country as a whole. The opinion that he was more likely to listen to reason was also more noticeable<sup>188</sup>. However, Mr Major's caution was soon being interpreted as indecisiveness and, as the state of the economy worsened in the mid 1990s, his personal qualities were being called into question more and more. Most notable in all this data is that the Party seemed to make no effort to change its 'POMP' in spite of consistent warnings from the electorate.

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<sup>188</sup> Gallup Political & Economic Index, #365, January 1991, p8 onwards.

## ***Appendix B***

### ***Correlation Between Levels of Government Subsidies and Unemployment in the British Regions***

<b><i>Region</i></b>	<b><i>n.</i></b>	<b><i>Pearson Correlation</i></b>	<b><i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i></b>
<b><i>Scotland</i></b>	16	0.712 ***	0.002
North	15	0.458	0.86
North West	15	0.614 *	0.15
East Midlands	15	0.237	0.395
West Midlands	15	-0.726 *	0.011
South West	15	-0.38	0.893
Wales	15	0.366	0.179

\*\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

*4.8 – Data for Calculations from: Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1997, p133 and Regional Trends, 1990, p182; 1992, p145 & 2000, p177.*

Table 4.8 demonstrates how dependent Scotland was on central Government subsidies for its economic well being by supporting the proposition that Scotland was the only region in Britain that had such significant dependence on money from the central Government.

## ***Appendix C: Local Council Functions***

The following list has been drawn from the current Stirling Council website ([www.stirling.gov.uk](http://www.stirling.gov.uk)). It demonstrates well what a wide range of issues still come under the prerogative of Local Government in Scotland. The list is not exhaustive. However, when it is taken in conjunction with the new powers of MSPs, this information is useful in assessing who will go on to play the most influential role in the lives of Scottish voters. Perhaps the issues in the 'Services' section afford Local Authorities the most contact and consequent influence with their constituents. It should also be noted that the Council undertakes partnerships with other agencies to formulate 'joined up Government.' Issues such as healthcare and policing are included in these schemes.

**Council:** Local Elections, Council Tax and jobs for the local community.

**\*\*\* Services \*\*\*** Waste management (reduction of waste, re-use, recycle, home composting, refuse collection), planning (schedule, building control, local plan, structure plan etc.), housing (repairs, rents and allocations), care (aftercare, home helps, childcare, crèches), libraries and schools.

**Business:** Advice, co-ordination and licensing.

**Leisure:** Sports centres and playing fields.

**Tourism:** Local places of interest, monuments etc.

**Community:** Various interest groups, community centres and halls.

**Family Life:** Adoption, marriage and bereavement.

**Travel:** Pavements, road signs, safety and some public transportation (buses, in particular).

**Animals:** dog shelter, strays, pest control, fouling etc.

## ***Appendix D: Powers of the Scottish Parliament***

The Scottish Parliament's Public Information Service has produced a document called *You and Your MSPs*. In it, the devolved matters that come under the jurisdiction of the Parliament are listed thus:

- health
- education and training
- local government
- social work
- housing
- planning
- tourism, economic development and financial assistance to industry
- some aspects of transport, including the Scottish road network, bus policy and ports and harbours
- law and home affairs, including most aspects of criminal and civil law, the prosecution system and the courts
- Police and Fire Services
- environment
- natural and built heritage
- agriculture, forestry and fishing
- sport and the arts
- statistics, public registers and records

As can be seen, the Parliament is claiming several important issues that have usually been administered by Local Government. In many instances, Councils still seem to believe that they are in charge (for example, housing and education). Close examination of the *Scotland Act 1998* and subsequent Local Government legislation usually reveals which level of government has prerogative over certain issues. It is unlikely that many citizens would do this when in need of help. Therefore, the chances of voters going to the wrong level are high. It will therefore be interesting to see whether party political allegiances could be affected by MSPs 'poaching' work and subsequent voters' gratitude from Local Councillors.

## ***5. Metropolitan-Peripheral Governmental Relations 1979-1997: 'Rolling Back the State'***

### ***Introduction***

In Chapter 3, we saw how the Conservative central Governments in the 1980s sought to court the votes of new homeowners. The 'Right to Buy' scheme achieved this goal to a significant degree in England, but was not so successful north of the border. Traditionally accepted reasons for why this might have been the case were dealt with in Chapter 4. A new dimension of the dynamic has also begun to emerge. This thesis seeks to emphasise the role of Local Government in Scotland in the demise of the Conservative Party in General Elections there. This chapter will, with the housing issue as a primary example, assess how successive Conservative central Governments liaised with, and, very importantly, controlled and dictated to, Local Authorities north of the border.

A vital aspect of the Conservatives' 'POMP' was its re-structuring of the, mainly financial, relationship between the central Government and Local Authorities. Along with inflation and recession, the Conservative elite saw Local Authority spending as a huge problem in the early 1980s<sup>1</sup>. Key motivations for the Conservatives' policies in the 1980s were to increase Local Government accountability and to reduce the financial burden on central

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<sup>1</sup> Riddell, 1985, p43 & Tony Travers in: Stewart, John & Stoker, Gerry (eds.): "Local Government in the 1990s", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1995, p12.

Government<sup>2</sup>. The potential benefits for the Party's 'POS' were twofold. Firstly, it was hoped that the electorate would associate more efficient and, thus, cheaper, local services with central Government initiatives; and vote accordingly in subsequent General Elections<sup>3</sup>. Secondly, if somewhat belatedly, it was hoped that this effect would extend to Local Government elections. This is vital for this thesis, as it demonstrates recognition on the part of the metropolitan elite that having substantial numbers of Conservatives in office at the Local Authority level would make the implementation of 'POMP' measures somewhat smoother<sup>4</sup>. It seems, however, that the Conservative Leadership did not attend to the matter early enough. Furthermore, we must assess the possibility that, by virtue of the cuts in Local Government funding and power inherent to the 'Rolling Back the State' programme, the central Government inspired Opposition-controlled Local Authorities to organise concerted campaigns against the Conservatives.

It is important to note that the Whitehall departments who need to liaise most closely with Local Government are the Scottish and Welsh Offices and the Department of the Environment. These departments manage the interface between national Government policy and, through the policy-implementing agencies of Local Government, the daily lives of citizens<sup>5</sup>. This *locus* could be considered to be the juncture between high and low politics. This thesis seeks to investigate the proposition that it was because they failed to successfully manage this dynamic in Scotland that the Conservatives' 'POS' failed north of the border. That is to say, by

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<sup>2</sup> Riddell, 1985, p43; Tony Travers in: Stewart & Stoker (eds.) 1995, p12 & Thatcher, 1993, p618.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

failing to maintain adequate representation in, and workable relations with, Local Government in Scotland, the Conservative elite was putting their General Election chances there in jeopardy.

In order to establish the nature of the relationship between central and Local Government in Scotland, the main theme of this chapter is analysis of measures taken and statutory powers used by Conservative central Governments to exert control over Local Authorities. Within this theme, the issues of funding and spending control are key. After introductory sections on each of these, the chapter assesses how the various metropolitan strategies impacted on Local Government in Scotland. Therefore, there are sections on the funding of Council Housing and how 'Rolling Back the State' was perpetuated in the 1980s and 1990s. The following section begins the assessment of why Opposition-controlled Local Authorities in Scotland may have been inclined to rally concerted support against the Conservatives.

### ***Metropolitan Government Control of Local Authorities***

The metropolitan Conservative elite was keen to reduce Local Government spending; thus hoping to gain votes in Local Government and General Elections through the 'POMP' and to minimise the funds available for self-promoting schemes devised by Labour Local Authorities<sup>6</sup>. The key tenets of the Conservative strategy were to weaken the Trade Unions' influence in Local Government and increase accountability of Local Authorities to the 'consumers', the tax-paying voters. The major tactics included stricter spending and income controls for Local Authorities, such as rate capping in the *Local Government and Planning*

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 & Thatcher, 1993, p651. This constituted an attack on the 'New Urban Left' – Rhodes, 1988, p191.



*(Scotland) Act, 1982* and subsidy cuts<sup>7</sup>. Cuts in central subsidies and other perceived regionally insensitive pieces of 'POMP', such as the withdrawal of financial help for the Gartcosh steel plant, caused Scottish Local Authorities to boycott meetings with the central Government in the mid-1980s<sup>8</sup>. However, it seems that this demonstration of dissidence did nothing to change the metropolitan Government's proposed policy course. The imbalance of power between the two levels of government ensured that there was often little that Local Authorities could do to overturn central policy decisions<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, peripheral dissidence, if it was to make gains for Opposition parties in the 'POS' would have to come in less direct forms.

Further friction with Local Government was caused in 1985 by the abolition of urban and Metropolitan Councils that the Conservative elite felt constituted significant opposition to their 'POMP.' Another important aspect of this strategy was the privatisation and sub-contracting of services that had been expensive for ratepayers<sup>10</sup>. It should be noted that, at least initially, many Councils were able to retain the power of service provision, with the attendant funding, by keeping the relevant contracts 'in house'<sup>11</sup>. This is an example of the methods that Local Authorities devised to circumvent the new central controls that were being imposed.

We have seen in Chapter 2, with regard to the Conservative Leadership, how the power of appointment is very important when collaboration is desired. Up until the mid-1970s, central Government had the power to appoint senior members of Local Authorities. However,

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<sup>7</sup> Rhodes, 1988, p278.

<sup>8</sup> *Times*, 6.9.85, p2.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>10</sup> Pickvance in: Pickvance & Preteceille (eds.), 1991, pp69-72.

especially after the *Local Government Act 1972*, this gift was substantially diminished<sup>12</sup>. Nonetheless, central Government still retains important legislative power over Local Authorities. A significant part of Local Government's remit is to administer and implement Westminster statutes. Therefore, Local Authorities can be forced to implement policies with which they may have substantial disagreement. With regard to Labour Councils in Scotland, having to carry out Poll Tax collection was the most potent example of such a disagreeable policy<sup>13</sup>.

Local Authorities may seek some autonomy in the passing of Bye-Laws or Private statutes applicable only to their jurisdictions. However, central control over these mechanisms is considerable, given that the Secretary of State needs to confirm all Bye-Laws and the increasing difficulty of passing any Private Bill through Westminster<sup>14</sup>. It should be remembered that central Government has no statutory power to directly effect the actions of Local Authorities. A Government in Westminster can only challenge a Local Authority in the same way as a private citizen; that is to say by appealing through the judicial system that a Council is acting *ultra vires* if it refuses to carry out a statutory obligation or goes beyond its remit. Nonetheless, central Governmental control of the offices of the Attorney General in England and Lord Advocate in Scotland usually means that such appeals can be expedited quickly and successfully<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Kevin Doogan in: Stoker (ed.), 1999, p76.

<sup>12</sup> Prophet, John: "The Councillor. 11<sup>th</sup> Ed.", Crayford, Shaw & Sons, 1997, p22.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 + Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>14</sup> Prophet, 1997, p29.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p30.

It is interesting to note that, whilst the Thatcherite reforms were very unpopular on the Local Government level, there were hardly any substantial effective protests. Even in Scotland, where the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities might have been expected to provide some sort of cohesion, there was never enough unity of spirit or action to cause the metropolitan Government any significant trouble<sup>16</sup>. COSLA was only seen to be a unifying force and effective in negotiations with central Government over 'minor local' issues such as Rate Support Grants up to 1979<sup>17</sup>. The only protests that had any delaying effect on the 'POMP' were due to individual bargaining between specific Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Office<sup>18</sup>. Rhodes also makes the important point that the dis-aggregation of Scottish Local Authorities may have weakened their bargaining positions, but also concurrently threatened central autonomy; a threat that the Conservatives tried to counter by retaining ideas of a dual polity through the Scottish Office. The most powerful force that dissuaded Scottish Local Authorities from uniting more often in concerted opposition to the metropolitan administration was the imbalance of power between the two levels of government. It was often the case that less well-off Labour-controlled Councils in Scotland may have opposed the contemporary 'POMP' in principle, but could not countenance punitive central subsidy cuts that would be brought down on them should they step outside their statutory regulations<sup>19</sup>. The next section introduces this powerful form of central control before more specific examples are sought from the housing issue.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01 & Gerry Stoker in: Stoker (ed.), 1999, p1.

<sup>17</sup> Rhodes, 1988, p275.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p281.

<sup>19</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

## ***Local Authority Funding Controls***

Stephen Lee writes that:

“Since the mid 1970s the combined effects of escalating public expenditure, public sector deficits and shifting political preferences has imposed an ever increasing pressure to restrain Local Authority spending”<sup>20</sup>.

An important feature to note here is that this issue was being raised before the Conservatives came to power in 1979<sup>21</sup>. Thus, further credence is given to the argument that Thatcherism was more of a typical Conservative reaction to contemporary problems, rather than a radical new ideology. One of the most obvious methods of controlling the actions of Local Authorities is through the levels of central subsidy. Subsidy cuts would always be a particularly awkward subject in Scotland, given their more prosperous position compared to England under the Barnett Formula and *per capita* spending<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, measures to this effect were being taken from the mid-1970s. Such steps included counting Local Authority spending as part of total Scottish expenditure by St. Andrew's House and an absolute refusal to allow Local Authorities to go over budget; they would have to lose future grant money and cut services if they did<sup>23</sup>. These cuts, implemented by Labour, reduced Local Authority expenditure financed by the centre by 7.5%<sup>24</sup>.

As we shall see in this chapter's analysis of central-peripheral Government relations over housing provision, one of the main issues being addressed by the Conservative metropolitan elite

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<sup>20</sup> Lee, 1995, p162.

<sup>21</sup> Daily Telegraph, 5.3.79, p8 & 19.3.79, p8.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews with Lords Sanderson, 30.11.00, Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01 & Fraser, 5.3.01 + Cm 2225 “Scotland in the Union”, 1993, §2.11, p14.

<sup>23</sup> Lee 1995, p163.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

was the funding of local socialist programmes with central subsidies<sup>25</sup>. The problem was that Mrs Thatcher never knew when to 'draw stumps' and withdraw from a situation that was making the Party more unpopular with the voters<sup>26</sup>. Here, the connection between the 'POMP' and losses at the polls was somewhat indirect, but nonetheless important. In this case, rather than the 'POMP' being directly unpopular with the electorate, it was Local Government representatives in Scotland who wished to complain. As this thesis demonstrates, such concerted opposition by this group had a considerable effect on the 'POS.' Once Local Authorities do have their funding, the next important source of central control is to impose restrictions on how it can be spent. Again, this topic is briefly examined now to clarify subsequent examples from the housing issue.

### ***Local Authority Spending Controls***

Since the end of the Nineteenth Century, Local Government has lost the Common Law right to conduct its affairs and spending as it sees fit<sup>27</sup>. Mainly due to the large amounts of expenditure and subsidy involved, the Westminster Parliament now has to authorise most of the actions of Local Government. Local Authorities have a statutory right to receive funding, but increasing central controls are being placed on how this money can be spent, and on which particular projects. This increased central interference has been a cause of much antagonism amongst local politicians<sup>28</sup>, and has increased their desire to rally voters against the central

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<sup>25</sup> Cole, 1995, p315.

<sup>26</sup> Interviews with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00, David McLetchie, 19.1.01, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 + Young, Hugo: "One of Us – Final Edition", London, Macmillan, 1991, p622.

<sup>27</sup> Prophet, 1997, p21.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01 + Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

administration<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, the next task is to introduce how central Government in the 1980s and 1990s sought to exert its control over Local Authority spending in Scotland in order to understand how this dynamic may have exacerbated the Conservatives' General electoral problems north of the border.

Mitchell identifies the housing policies of the early 1980s as an ideal test ground for Conservative anti-Local Authority spending ploys<sup>30</sup>. These tactics for limiting Local Authority spending continued through the 1980s, even after the perceived overspending seemed to have finished<sup>31</sup>. Lynch goes on to assert that the issue of Local Authority financial regulation was the cause of most Anglo-Scottish tension in the 1980s. The central Government was furthering a programme to promote uniformity around Local Government<sup>32</sup>. Kellas claims that this re-assertion of central power effectively combated secessionist nationalism as well<sup>33</sup>. A very definite message about the supremacy of Westminster was being sent out. Because of this, Labour used nationalist arguments in its rhetoric in Scotland<sup>34</sup>. This split the nationalist vote. However, the Conservatives still did not manage to win over disenchanted Labour voters who were not nationalists. They could find a more natural home with the Liberals<sup>35</sup>. The four party system in Scotland, during times when the SNP has electoral credibility, affects the Conservatives' prospects significantly, as they have to fight with an extra enemy for a share of

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<sup>29</sup> Interviews with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell, 1990, p116.

<sup>31</sup> Lynch, 1991, p448.

<sup>32</sup> Grey, 1994, p51 & Stoker, 1995, p102.

<sup>33</sup> Kellas, James: "The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity – 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998, p108.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with David McLetchie, 19.1.01.

the 40% of the electorate who are not committed Labour voters<sup>36</sup>. As we have seen, the agents and policies of Local Government in Scotland have the potential to affect the way that their constituents make their choices in General Elections. Given that many Local Authorities were in Labour hands during the 1980s and 1990s in Scotland, it would therefore have seemed prudent for the Conservative administrations in London not to cause too much friction with these Councils for fear of inciting well-organised opposition in subsequent General Elections.

In the same way as the Poll Tax, Scotland can be seen as a 'guinea pig' for new central Government policies in the area of Local Government spending control. For example, the Secretary of State for Scotland could determine what constituted 'excessive and unreasonable' spending by a Local Authority long before this power was given to the Department of the Environment in England until 1985<sup>37</sup>. As Secretary of State for Scotland, George Younger took the first punitive measures against Local Authorities in 1981 when he withheld £45m from Lothian and £1.2m from Stirling<sup>38</sup>. The then Minister of State for Local Government, Tom King, was quoted as saying that if Local Authorities were not prepared to meet the new spending targets, Local Government in Britain was finished in its present form<sup>39</sup>. Local Authorities were going to have to re-assess their current practices in two major areas: those of spending of central subsidies and staffing levels<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid + Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>37</sup> Rhodes, 1988, p279.

<sup>38</sup> Times, 22.7.81, p2.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Times Education Scottish Supplement, 11.7.80, p1 + Times, 5.6.81, p4 & 31.8.82, p3.

As service provision forms the core of Local Government's remit, funding has become a key issue. Thereby, central Government has found a way to exert increasing amounts of control over Local Authorities. As the following examination of funding in the Scottish housing system demonstrates, the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s reformed many of the sources of funding and accountability/spending control structures of Local Government. Thereby, they attempted to win the votes of individuals who began to enjoy less of a tax burden and, simultaneously, put closer controls on the self-promoting activities of Local Authorities.

### ***The Funding of Local Authority Housing***

Within this thesis' examination of the *1980 Housing Act* in Chapter 3, we saw how the 'Right to Buy' scheme was implemented by the metropolitan Government in order to swell the 'property-owning democracy' and reduce the influence of Local Government on voters' lives. However, there was another purpose for that, and subsequent, legislation in the housing sphere. A higher degree of central Government control was being placed upon Local Authorities. Their finances, which may have been used to pay for socialist/'loony left' programmes<sup>41</sup>, were being tightened. This policy is a good example of the way in which the Prime Minister was always looking for solutions to perceived problems through any means available.

Housing subsidies form a considerable proportion of central subsidies to Local Government, and were dealt with in VI, I, 97 (1) (a-c) of the *Housing Act 1980*. The subsidies were to be calculated by the formula:



*Base Amount + Housing Costs Differential - Local Contribution Differential.*

The 'Base Amount' was the previous year's subsidy. HCD was defined as the difference from the previous year in 'reasonable' expenditure, mainly for repairs. It is significant that the metropolitan Government had the power to decide what constituted 'reasonable' levels of spending; as such estimations could easily have been tailored to suit their budgets. LCD was the difference in income to a Local Authority's Housing Revenue Account; mainly accounted for by rent payments, but - very importantly - also to include moneys from the sale of their properties under the 'Right to Buy' scheme. If Local Authorities wanted to receive a decent subsidy, therefore, they could not put up their rents too much. Thus, the Thatcher Government would have appeared to be the friend of the tenant; a very beneficial image in the sphere of 'POS', and simultaneously been able to closely manage the finances of socialist Local Authorities<sup>42</sup>.

The impact of this legislation was demonstrated by the way in which the metropolitan Government had to defend it before Parliament. Malcolm Rifkind realised that Scottish Local Authorities were deeply unhappy with linking capital allocation with rent levels, but insisted that the Government was convinced of the need to do so for the national interest<sup>43</sup>. That these changes marked the first substantial amendments to the HRA system since 1919 demonstrates

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<sup>41</sup> Tony Travers in: Stewart & Stoker (eds.), 1995, p13.

<sup>42</sup> As far as the Government was concerned, their housing policy was very successful in achieving its main aim of containing socialist opposition manifested in Local Authorities – Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01 + Brown *et al*, 1996, p106.

<sup>43</sup> HC112, 1980-1981, p18.

how vigorous, and, thus, susceptible to criticism, the Thatcherite agenda for Local Government reform was<sup>44</sup>.

Similarly, central Government was in a strong position to manage what Local Authorities did with the money that they eventually received. If, again, a Council wanted to continue to receive decent levels of central subsidy, it would have to spend the money on housing to maximise its HCD. Not only would this ensure that Local Authority housing stock would be in good condition for re-sale, but also continue to divert funds from socialist programmes. Lee asserts that Local Authorities tried to respond to these measures with 'creative accounting' practices, increased charges on housing services and increased rents. These measures were justified as protection against Domestic Rate rises due to falling central subsidies<sup>45</sup>. However, as has been discussed, the central Government had accounted for such attempts in the LCD sections of the legislation. I, I, 8, (1) of the *Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980* reduced the number of restrictions on Local Authorities who wished to sell their properties. In an age of increased central control, this clause may seem out of character. However, it should be remembered that any extra income that Local Authorities generated from the sale of their properties would reduce the level of central subsidy that they could claim, as their Housing Revenue Accounts would be more self-financing.

The latter parts of the *Housing Act 1980* returned to the twin Thatcherite agendas of selling Council Houses and re-structuring the central-local financial relationship. V, I, 90 of the

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<sup>44</sup> Kenneth Spencer in: Stewart & Stoker (eds.), 1995, p156.

<sup>45</sup> Lee, 1995, p163.

Act asserted that Local Authorities were still obliged to consider the quality of their housing stock. The central Government was thus keen to maximise profits from the sale of existing stock in order to keep subsidy costs down. VI, I, 102 (1) (a) of the *Housing Act 1980* confirmed this central desire to retain as much power as possible through the subsidy issue. The Secretary of State was to retain the right to recoup any subsidy money that he or she felt was not being used for the intended purpose. According to this section, Local Authorities would have even less scope to use housing moneys for their own purposes than was engendered by the HCD clause in VI, I, 97 (1) (a-c).

VI, I, 117 (1) & (2) of the *Housing Act 1980* made provision for Rent Allowances to rise from 75% to 90%. Rate Fund Contributions were to fall from 25% to 10%. Rate Capping, another instrument of central control, was to appear in the *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1981*, the *Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982* and the *Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1984*. High Local Authority spending was a key target for Conservative policy in the early 1980s. Their manifesto of 1983 promises to abolish Metropolitan Councils (which was done in 1985) and continue with Rate Capping<sup>46</sup>.

Again, this is an example of the central Government managing to appeal to the electorate at large, whilst concurrently exerting considerable levels of tight financial control on Local Government. Even though Rent Allowances were technically being put up, with consequent benefits to the central Government's image with tenant voters, Local Authorities could not really take advantage of too much of this extra funding. To do so would involve raising the absolute

level of their rents. This would be disastrous with Local Government Elections being imminent. Similarly, the parallel cut in Rate Allowance precluded another avenue for Labour Councils to maximise central funding for their political projects. They already knew that rent increases were out of the question, even if central funding was available. Now, they could not raise rates either, as sufficient central funding to alleviate the effect on local electors was reduced.

A small loophole for Local Authorities appeared to open in IX, I, 143 (2) of the *1980 Housing Act*. Here, permission was given to transfer Housing Revenue Account money into the General Rate Fund. This could have been a method for Local Authorities to keep Rates down, and thus appear to be more voter-friendly. Given that marginal constituencies or wards would necessarily contain more (usually) affluent Conservative voters who would be likely to be paying quite high Rates, being able to keep their bills small would benefit incumbent Labour or Liberal Councils. However, the loophole closed quickly due to the LCD clause of VI, I, 97 (1) (a-c) of the *Housing Act 1980*, as detailed above. With regard to this issue, it should be noted that the Poll Tax was inspired by Mrs Thatcher's opposition to the inequitable Rating system and its effect on affluent Conservative voters, which was particularly notable in Scotland, from 1974 onwards<sup>47</sup>. When examining the 'POS' in Scotland, therefore, the role of middle class Conservative voters should not be overlooked<sup>48</sup>. Firstly, the Poll Tax was initiated on their behalf. Secondly, their defection to nationalist inclinations in the 1990s demonstrates how Conservative 'POMP' measures from London were unpopular with Scots as a whole. However,

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<sup>46</sup> In: Dale (ed.), 2000, p304.

<sup>47</sup> Interviews with James Mitchell, 8.6.00, Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.01.01 & Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.01.01.

<sup>48</sup> Paterson, 1994, p171 + interviews with David McLetchie, 19.1.01 & Lord MacKay of

it should be remembered that property-owning middle class status was never as prevalent in Scotland as in England<sup>49</sup>.

The final section of the 1980 Act with relevant impact on this thesis concerned the repair of Local Authority housing. IX, I, 134, (2) established a Housing Repairs Account System. IX, I, 149 gave Local Authorities the right to require tenants to effect repairs on their homes. Especially by 1987, this emphasis on repair rather than build anew was at the forefront of the Conservative housing provision programme<sup>50</sup>. Whilst these may seem to form part of a traditional housing policy agenda, the resulting effects are still very much part of the New Right programme of property-ownership extension and Local Government control. If tenants are forced to make repairs, they will be more likely to want to buy their property, rather than let the landlord reap the benefits of their work. Furthermore, the effected repairs would necessarily put up the market value of the properties. Thus, if they sold, the Local Authority's LCD would rise, consequently necessitating lower central Government subsidy, with consequent popular tax savings to the electorate at large<sup>51</sup>. The period from 1979 was thus characterised by the central Government trying to place as many such financial curbs as possible on Local Authorities<sup>52</sup>.

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Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>49</sup> Finlay in: Francis & Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), 1996, p122.

<sup>50</sup> Party manifesto 1987, in: Dale (ed.), 2000, p319.

<sup>51</sup> Local Government involvement in housing had started in the 1890s. Thereafter, central governments have had to find the difficult balance between service/subsidy provision and unpopular tax increases – Lee, 1995, p45.

<sup>52</sup> Marr, Andrew: “Ruling Britannia – The Failure and Future of British Democracy”, London, Michael Joseph, 1995, p76.

The *Housing Act 1980* has been identified as an important turning point in the Thatcherite programme for widening the Conservatives' support and a demonstration of how the new Government was seeking to make amendments to the existing relationship between core and periphery parts of the state<sup>53</sup>. A compelling argument is that Thatcherism was not an ideology, but a change in justification for new Conservative policies<sup>54</sup>. With regard to the issues in this chapter, it is important to note that, due to a fresh set of ideas being in place in Downing Street, core-periphery relations, as manifested in the Local Government housing issue, would be changing. Whilst the *Housing Act 1980* is always remembered as a landmark in the course of extension of property-ownership, its effect on the finances of Local Government should not be overlooked. Given the hypothesis in this work, substantial changes in the central-Local Government relationship will always be of interest. If the hypothesis is correct, this is particularly important in the case of Scottish Local Authorities.

### ***'Rolling Back the State' in Scotland***

Grey identifies a definite agenda in Thatcherite dealings with Local Government<sup>55</sup>. A successful economy<sup>56</sup> was of most importance, closely followed by a desire for the state to be as free as possible from special interest demands (Trade Unions especially) in the light of the economic stagnation of the 1970s. The market was seen as superior to the state with regard to resource allocation<sup>57</sup>. These ideas were to inspire policies identified as 'Rolling Back the State.'

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<sup>53</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick & Rose (eds.), 1982, p165.

<sup>54</sup> Evans & Taylor, 1996, p219.

<sup>55</sup> Grey, 1994, p57.

<sup>56</sup> On this subject, Bulpitt writes: "Local Government has taken the brunt of the Government's economy offensive", in: Madgwick & Rose (eds.), 1982, p166.

<sup>57</sup> Stoker, 1999, p3.

As we have seen in this and earlier chapters, the metropolitan Governments' policies were designed due to the ideological beliefs of the New Right. That is to say, with a mind to reducing state interference in citizens' lives and promoting the apparent virtues of accountability and economic efficiency in the provision of essential services<sup>58</sup>. However, we also saw earlier how the Conservatives have always formulated their 'POMP' with a pragmatic view to holding office. Therefore, it was no coincidence that these ostensibly ideology-based policies effected tax cuts and increased freedom of choice for voters. The metropolitan Governments of the time planned that these changes in society would bring them votes. They were correct in this assumption with regard to affluent England, where the citizens could take advantage of the new opportunities. The economic climate in Scotland was different, however. As they had less stake in the benefits of the 'POMP' and due to the extra influence of Local Government north of the border, the voters there were more susceptible to the manoeuvres of Labour-led Councils.

Bulpitt notes how Local Authorities had been becoming increasingly powerful since the 1960s<sup>59</sup>. Therefore, it is possible to appreciate the thinking behind Conservative housing policy. They were hoping to exert more control over Local Authorities through central subsidy cuts and increased accountability to local voters who, as property owners, would look for better and cheaper services<sup>60</sup>. Bulpitt asserts that events of the 1970s generated new levels of core-periphery contact in the 1980s<sup>61</sup>. Failing economic efficiency led to central calls for closer Local Authority accounting, as demonstrated by the *Housing Act 1980*. One result of the perceived

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<sup>58</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick & Rose (eds.), 1982, p167 & Cosgrove, Patrick: "Thatcher. The First Term", London, The Bodley Head, 1985, p59.

<sup>59</sup> Bulpitt in: Madgwick & Rose (eds.), 1982, p166.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

increase in central interference was that ratepayers were becoming more politicised<sup>62</sup>. This effect was manifested in two ways at the opposite ends of the political spectrum in Scotland. Existing Conservatives there were very keen on the New Right ideals espoused by the Thatcherite administration<sup>63</sup>. Indeed, it was these voters that were to call for the re-evaluation of the Domestic Rating system that led to the introduction of the Community Charge<sup>64</sup>. On the left in Scotland, it was becoming apparent that the perceived 'bossy' authoritarian interventionist style of the new very English Prime Minister was adding more weight to arguments against Conservative rule from London<sup>65</sup>. The key dynamics to assess in this issue are the effects of the 'POMP' on Scottish Local Authorities, and how these units of Local Government were able to marshal and cajole General Election opposition to the Conservatives as a result.

As we saw in Chapter 3, Local Government has an enhanced role in Scottish society. Therefore, any metropolitan measures to disrupt this process are of interest. The Local Authority housing issue again provides a suitable example of such dynamics north of the border. A substantial amount of power was transferred from Local Government to Whitehall by I, I, 4, of the *Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980*, whereby the Secretary of State could oversee and even amend housing sale conditions. I, I, 15 of the Act saw Local Authorities losing more powers; this time to Housing Associations, who were under the control of the Housing

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<sup>61</sup> Bulpitt, 1983, p173.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p181.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>64</sup> Interviews with Andrew Gamble, 16.3.00, David Seawright, 13.4.00, Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00, Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 + Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>65</sup> Interviews with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00, David McLetchie, 19.1.01, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01 + Young, 1991, p622.



Corporation – thus granting the central Government a higher degree of control. This clause extended the range of projects that may qualify for Housing Association grants. II, I, 24 (1) of the Act required Local Authorities to pay departing tenants for any improvement work that they may have carried out on the property. Therefore, not only was there an incentive for tenants to take more pride in their dwellings, which was an essential component of making them want to join the property-owning classes, but the re-sale values of the dwellings would also rise, thus ultimately reducing the levels of central Government subsidy. Furthermore, the Government was once again narrowing the scope of how Local Authorities could spend their money.

Seemingly, the central Government was still looking to perpetuate Local Authority renting towards the end of the *Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980*. However, IV, I, 37 (2) (a-b) of this Act revealed their true agenda. This clause tightened London's control over Local Authority rents. Thus, the metropolitan Government could promote itself as the protector of tenants. However, just as important to the Conservatives was the increased ability to control how much funding Labour Councils could raise for their socialist schemes<sup>66</sup>. A final clause in the same vein was V, I, 66 (1) (a), which reduced the number of acceptable circumstances in which improvement grants could be made. Whilst this may have stifled a few attempts at upgrading (as promoted in II, I, 24 (1) of the same Act), it ensured that the Government could keep a check on the spending that they had to subsidise and that they only had to pay for work in constituencies where it would benefit them. So far, there seems to be little that Scottish voters could have objected to. Indeed, the tenants were being given more opportunities to take advantage of the 'Right to Buy' scheme than their English counterparts. Thus, Local

Government in Scotland may indeed have played an important role in preventing the Conservatives from benefiting in elections from this regionally sensitive piece of 'POMP.' Such energetic campaigning on the part of Local Government in Scotland was invigorated by the contemporary 'POMP' pertaining to their powers and finances.

The Conservatives added to their housing subsidy controls that were in the *Housing Act 1980* by decreeing that the Scottish Office could reduce central grants and even order Rate cuts where the metropolitan Government felt that Local Authority expenditure was 'unreasonable'<sup>67</sup>. Throughout the era in question, the Conservative Governments in London persistently strove for lower Local Government spending due to their ideology and quest for the votes of grateful taxpayers. Local Authorities were frequently warned against over-spending and over-staffing during the early Thatcher years<sup>68</sup>. The same message was still being issued towards the end of the Major era<sup>69</sup>. Towards the very end, £96m was going to be paid to the new Unitary Councils in Scotland to help with re-organisation<sup>70</sup>; and even £10m cash bonuses were being offered to Local Authorities with the lowest spending levels<sup>71</sup>. Even though the punitive aspect of the central Government's strategy had disappeared, it seems that they were still trying to court votes by keeping taxes down. However, such amelioration was too late as the Party's reputation had been too severely damaged amongst Scottish Local Authorities and, consequently, with the voters there as well. Despite its failure to achieve the desired results in Scotland, however,

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Ross Harper, 6.8.01.

<sup>68</sup> Daily Telegraph, 19.3.79, p5, Times Educational Scottish Supplement, 11.7.80, p1 & Times, 5.6.81, p4.

<sup>69</sup> Times Educational Scottish Supplement, 23.2.96, p3.

<sup>70</sup> A figure rejected as being inadequate – Times, 5.3.96, p2.

'Rolling Back the State' was not tempered after its implementation. We will examine how the programme was perpetuated now. This will demonstrate how insensitive 'POMP' allowed opposition Local Authorities in Scotland to benefit in the 'POS.'

### ***Perpetuation of 'Rolling Back the State'***

The *Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980* was the next significant piece of legislation in the housing/Local Authority spending control question after the *Housing Act 1980*. Part V of this Act seemed to give more help to citizens at the lower end of the economic scale. V, I, 33 (1) ensured a system of Domestic Rate relief. Such a clause would usually induce Labour Councils to put up their Rates. They could take this revenue enhancing measure with little fear of a backlash from local voters, as the subsidies would take care of the extra burden. However, the Local Contribution Differential clause in the calculation for central subsidies was again to keep a check on Rate levels<sup>72</sup>. The metropolitan Government achieved a further double success with V, I, 33 (1) of the Act. This clause stipulated that owners of unoccupied properties were still liable to pay rates. Not only did this keep the values of Local Authorities' LCD high enough to reduce the need for central subsidies, with inherent tax burden; it also looked like the Government was challenging Rackmanite landlords on behalf of the people. In Scotland, these landlords were very often the Local Council. The former benefit would have been more important to the metropolitan Government. The latter, however, would also have helped their levels of support.

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<sup>71</sup> *Times Educational Scottish Supplement*, 21.2.97, p1.

<sup>72</sup> Central subsidies = Base Amount + Housing Costs Differential - Local Contribution Differential (*Housing Act 1980* - VI, I, 97 (1) (a-c)). As rates are included in the LCD, it was not

Part VI of the *Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980* was concerned with central support for Local Government in the area of rates. VI, I, 48 (1) stated that the Secretary of State may reduce Rate Support Grants to Local Authorities if the uniform rate for the area in question was greater than the national uniform rate<sup>73</sup>. This was a further example of central Government reducing the ability of Local Authorities to charge high Rates to fund their own projects. Scottish Local Authorities sought to oppose this piece of 'POMP', as they had done over similar issues such as the re-organisation of Housing Benefit<sup>74</sup>. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities endorsed such a plan. However, as we have already seen, it was very difficult for the various Local Authorities north of the border to engineer sufficient unity of purpose and endeavour to seriously challenge the metropolitan Government directly. Nonetheless, any resentment held by Local Authorities in Scotland against the metropolitan Government is important to note, as it seems to be the case that they could muster significant opposition in their communities at General Elections.

The system for central support for rates was formalised in VI, I, 53 (1) (a-b) and VI, I, 54 (1) (a) of the *Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980*. There, the following formula was set out:

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in the interests of Local Authorities to charge too much – Lee, 1995, p203 + Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>73</sup> The 'national uniform rate' being what the Secretary of State calculates that Local Authorities need to charge to cover their costs; thus giving a lot of power to the centre.

<sup>74</sup> *Times*, 6.7.82, p3 – reporting how George Younger had cut Stirling's RSG by £1.2m because he felt that the Council was overspending.

$$\text{Domestic Rate Relief Grant} + \text{Block Grant} = \text{Rate Support Grant}^{75}.$$

The question of central subsidy was continued in the *Social Security and Housing Benefits Act 1982*. There, Local Authorities and Housing Associations were obliged to institutionalise statutory Rate and rent rebate schemes for their tenants [II, I, 28 (1) (a)]. Whilst citizens were not to be allowed to use these moneys to fund mortgage payments, the policy was still consistent with one of the Government's other main goals. The Secretary of State was claiming a lot of power in deciding how much funding Local Authorities could receive. Indeed, deciding what an 'appropriate' level of funding actually was again to be left in the gift of the Secretary of State [*Social Security and Housing Benefits Act 1982*, II, I, 29 (2)]. Even though subsidies could be paid out for up to 90% of Local Government expenditure [II, I, 32 (3) (a)], central control and reduced costs were evident. Local Authorities could still not pay out too much if they know that 10% of their bills would have to be self-financed. To exert further control on how Local Authorities were to use their finances, II, I, 34 (1) of the Act gave a formula for calculating how much of a Local Authority's Rate Fund Contribution (RFC) must be paid into their Housing Revenue Account (HRA). It was:

$$\text{RFC to be paid into HRA} = (\text{Total HRA Rebate} + \text{Costs}) - \text{Rent Rebate Subsidy paid into HRA}$$

Therefore, it would not be in the interests of Local Authorities to put up their rents too much, as such a measure would have increased the value of their 'Rent Rebate Subsidy.' Local

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<sup>75</sup> In this equation, the 'Block Grant' equals 'Rate Support Grants' minus 'Domestic Rate Relief' and 'Rate Support Grants' were not to include housing subsidies.

Authorities may have been inclined towards such a tactic, as it would not have cost them votes due to rent rebates being available to tenants. By 1985, COSLA saw fit to complain to Parliament about this system<sup>76</sup>. They did not complain too much about Housing Expenditure Limits imposed by the Secretary of State through HRA calculations, even though Local Authority control over rent levels was seriously diminished. However, once it became apparent that central subsidies were to be dropped to a very low statutory limit, COSLA expressed the view that more central money was needed if they were to avoid having to put up rents at twice the rate of inflation. By 1984-1985, COSLA was budgeting for a Rate Fund Contribution expenditure of £120.4m, whilst the metropolitan Government was offering a RFC of only £89.5m<sup>77</sup>. Steve Leach identifies COSLA's non-co-operation as having been severely detrimental to the Government's efforts to re-organise Local Government. As we have seen, however, others feel that the various Local Authorities in Scotland lacked the cohesion and unity necessary to mount substantial campaigns against the central Government<sup>78</sup>. The main point of contention in the housing issue was that, whilst some autonomy was being granted to the periphery, the powers of the Secretary of State were broadening to an even greater degree<sup>79</sup>.

XIII, I, 417 (1) (a-d) and XIII, I, 419 (1) of the *Housing Act 1985* show how the Government was still keen to keep close watch over the finances of Local Authorities. The former required the keeping of detailed Housing Revenue Accounts (income and expenditure) regarding all housing within a Local Authority's jurisdiction. The latter stipulated that a

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<sup>76</sup> HC328, 1984-1985, p9.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Including Keith Harding – Interview, 12.11.01 + respondents to Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

Housing Repairs Account was also to be kept. These were not new measures, but the re-iteration of their importance makes it clear that Westminster was no longer prepared to allow Local Government to continue as a bottomless pit of unaccounted subsidy money.

The issue of central subsidy was one that the Conservatives were very keen to address. Not only could they save tax paying voters' money by tightening the scheme, but could also keep a check on Labour schemes undertaken by Local Councils. XIII, I, 422 (1) (a-c) of the 1985 *Housing Act* confirmed the same formula as the 1980 *Housing Act* ( $Subsidy = Base Amount + HCD - LCD$ ). Therefore, the same restraints were being put on Local Authorities as to the levels of rents and rates that they could charge. Similarly, the central Government was still looking good in the eyes of the voters who appreciated their protection against high living costs.

Part IV of the *Housing (Scotland) Act 1987* puts the onus for maintaining standards onto Local Government. IV, I, 85 (1) of this Act stated that Local Authorities must ensure tolerable standards of living in their area. IV, I, 88 (1) permitted Local Authorities to order buildings to be repaired, as long as the dwellings were not in Housing Action Areas. IV, I, 89 (1-2) gave Local Authorities more powers to condemn or order the immediate improvement of buildings in HAA's. These sorts of powers were continued into Part V of the Act. V, I, 108 (1) gave Local Authorities the power to serve notice for repairs to be carried out. All these schemes may seem to have had the interest of inhabitants at heart. However, they also formed part of the central Government's strategy to make Local Government shoulder more responsibility and cost for housing and get more properties into a reasonable state for selling off. Hence, Opposition Local

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<sup>79</sup> Leach in: Stewart & Stoker (eds.), 1995, p54.  
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Authorities in Scotland were becoming increasingly interested in organising concerted opposition to the Government<sup>80</sup>.

Several grants were left in the gift of the Secretary of State to ensure that Local Government did not have too much of a financial burden imposed by London. This could have been a particularly powerful weapon in the hands of the increasingly nationalist Opposition parties in Scottish Local Government. IX, I, 191 (2) of the *Housing (Scotland) Act 1987* made provision for a Housing Support Grant, which was to take into account Local Authorities' income *and* expenditure on housing. The Scottish Special Housing Authority was still to receive grants from London [*Housing (Scotland) Act 1987*, IX, I, 194 (1)]. It should be noted that Local Government in Scotland had always marginalised the SSHA as an instrument of central control<sup>81</sup>.

As we have seen in earlier Acts, however, the Government in London was very keen to tightly control how exactly their money was to be spent. X, I, 203 (1) of the *Housing (Scotland) Act 1987* confirmed that Local Authorities were still to keep Housing Revenue Accounts and the Secretary of State was to retain the power to limit estimated rate fund contributions to this account [X, I, 204 (1)]. Thus, in addition to Local Contributions Differential restraints, Local Authorities could not raise their Rates in order to receive more subsidy. This is a measure that

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<sup>80</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>81</sup> Lee, 1995, p165.



would have hurt potential Conservative-voting ratepayers and would be blamed on the central Government<sup>82</sup>.

In the *Housing (Scotland) Act 1987*, Local Authorities were also ordered to maintain their Rent Rebate Accounts [X, I, 205 (1)]. Money to be credited to these accounts could be taken from rent rebate subsidies under the *Social Security and Housing Benefits Act 1982* [X, I, 205 (2) (a) *Housing (Scotland) Act 1987*]. Debits were to be rent rebates and costs [X, I, 205 (2) (b)]. X, I, 206 (1+2) ordered Local Authorities to keep a Rent Allowance Account as well, with similar credit and debit sources as above [X, I, 206 (1-2)]. Part III of the *Housing (Scotland) Act 1988* took yet more power from Local Government. III, I, 57 (1) gave Scottish Homes the right to approve 'Right to Buy' applicants. Local Authorities never had this right. Thus, the metropolitan Government was ensuring that Opposition Councils never had the chance to court votes through the application procedure.

It can be argued that this central system of 'clawing back' money and power from Local Authorities was started by Labour's limits on capital spending in 1975. However, Mrs Thatcher's campaign against municipal socialism had more effect<sup>83</sup>. With regard to the 'POS', the ultimate result was malevolent to the Conservatives as increased levels of Local Authority non-compliance in Scotland and the Poll Tax riots demonstrated<sup>84</sup>. This centralisation of power

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<sup>82</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>83</sup> By 1986, 75% of Local Authorities in England and Wales were receiving no central subsidies for housing – Malpass, Peter & Murie, Alan: "Housing Policy and Practice – 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.", Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1990, p100.

<sup>84</sup> Peden, G. C.: "British Economic and Social Policy – Lloyd George to Margaret Thatcher. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.", Hemel Hempstead, Philip Allan, 1991, p233 (the Poll Tax being part of the central

was the key difference with concurrent devotion to the New Right in the United States, thus confirming a more authoritarian attitude in this country<sup>85</sup>.

The *Local Government and Housing Act 1989* confirms that Local Authorities were still required to keep Housing Revenue Accounts [VI, I, 74 (1)]. The Local Authorities were duty bound to keep these accounts in credit by all reasonable measures, thus reducing the need for central subsidies, as provided for in VI, I, 80 (1) of the Act. As receipts from the sale of Council Houses could be credited to a Local Authority's HRA, they were thus encouraged to sell as many of their properties as possible. It was not until this piece of legislation was enacted that HRA's were 'ring-fenced'; that is to say that, before this Act, Local Authorities could still use Rates to fund their accounts<sup>86</sup>. Metropolitan Government control of Local Government finances was increasing rapidly at this time. The introduction of the Poll Tax was perhaps the highest profile manifestation of this new relationship. The *Local Government and Housing Act 1989* also insisted that a Housing Repairs Account must be kept [VI, I, 77 (1)]. As in all of the previous pieces of legislation dealing with the provision of subsidies by the central Government, the Secretary of State retained the ultimate power to decide upon an appropriate level of debt relief for Local Authorities [VI, I, 83 (1) (a-b)]. Malpass and Murie note that this legislation changed Local Authority spending patterns considerably<sup>87</sup>.

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Government's strategy to control Labour rates bills – Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01)  
+ Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>85</sup> John Robertson in: Waltman & Studlar (eds.), 1987, p38.

<sup>86</sup> Lund, 1996, p76.

<sup>87</sup> Malpass & Murie, 1990, p107.

Regarding the Government's desire to upgrade housing to reduce the financial burden on themselves and create new Conservative voters, this Act made provision for the declaration of 'Renewal Areas' by local Housing Authorities [*Local Government and Housing Act 1989*, VII, I, 89 (1)]. The Secretary of State could provide financial assistance for these areas [VII, I, 96 (1)]. Thus, especially given the increased central financial control involved, it is possible to see the possibilities for more social engineering.

VIII, I, 101 (1) of the *Local Government and Housing Act 1989* asserted that Local Authorities should be paying more towards housing repairs than the current levels. This demonstrated the central Government's continuing twin desires to direct Local Government funds towards 'appropriate' projects and win over newly affluent and better-housed voters. 18.6% of Local Authority housing stock was sold off in the 1980s<sup>88</sup>. The challenge facing the Conservatives was how to reap the political benefits of this phase<sup>89</sup>. In 1988-1989, Local Government spent £1325m (out of a national total of £6198m) on housing<sup>90</sup>. Housing was still costing the Conservatives in London a lot of taxpayers' money. This is despite the fact that, in real terms, expenditure on housing across Britain had halved from 1976-1977 to 1989-1990<sup>91</sup>. Again, speaking in real terms, housing subsidy in 1989-1990 was only 15% of its value in 1979-1980 in Scotland<sup>92</sup>. However, the metropolitan Government could argue that it was still helping in the housing issue. For example, mortgage tax relief had improved considerably - not of much

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<sup>88</sup> Lee, 1995, p201.

<sup>89</sup> Written Statement by Sir Malcolm Rifkind, 21.1.01.

<sup>90</sup> Lee, 1995, p162. 47.5% of this money was supplied through central subsidy.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p203.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p204.

use to Council tenants in urban Scotland - as had encouragement for the private sector. Again, this would be of little use to the many Scots who were still public sector tenants<sup>93</sup>.

As Mitchell notes, Local Government had been steadily amassing responsibilities through the Twentieth Century by the process known as 'administrative Devolution'<sup>94</sup>. Not only would such a pattern have ameliorated nationalists in Scotland, but also would have reduced the financial and bureaucratic burden on the metropolitan Government. The Conservatives are, as we have seen, in favour of such central autonomy from peripheral 'low politics.' Housing was one such issue that had been left in the hands of Local Authorities. Therefore, when the Thatcher administration began to legislate many new restrictions on the actions and funding of Local Government in this sphere, the core-periphery relationship was going to be significantly altered. The central administration's intervention in the housing issue was a departure from traditional dealings with Local Government, and marked one of the first major breeches in Local Authority autonomy<sup>95</sup>. A key question is how would voters and Local Authorities north of the border receive the changes? Before concluding on that question, the next section assesses whether the same motivations drove Conservative housing/Local Government funding policies when John Major took over.

### ***'Rolling Back the State' in the 1990s***

After the 'Taking Stock' exercise following the General Election victory of 1992, a major point to be emphasised to the people of Scotland was how their interests were being protected

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Mitchell, 1995, p1380.

and promoted by the Scottish Office in London. This role, which included investigations into how housing could be improved, was mentioned explicitly in the White Paper *Scotland In the Union – A Partnership for Good*<sup>96</sup>. The argument ran that the Scottish Office would take all decisions on Scottish domestic issues. Thereby, control by London would be reduced<sup>97</sup>. This opinion asserted that the Scottish Office defended the interests of Scotland in London, rather than merely being a conduit for the Government's decisions north of the border.

However, the familiar theme of extra central control on Local Government finances re-appeared in the *Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993*. II, I, 136 (3) of this Act commanded Local Authorities to pay a levy to the Government in London on each of the property disposals that they might make under 'Right to Buy' legislation. Nevertheless, Local Authorities were still duty-bound to provide housing for all welfare recipients in their areas [*Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993*, II, I, 149]. III, I, 158 (1) of this Act instituted the Urban Regeneration Agency (not an agency of the Crown – III, I, 158 (3)). The remit of this Agency was to include the acquisition and management of land for housing in addition to building and (re)development projects [III, I, 160 (1) (a-1)]. Thus, more power over housing was taken from Local Government and given to the centre. This was confirmed by the Secretary of State being given the ultimate power to approve this Agency's spending, including the provision of grants and loans [III, I, 164, (1-3)]. The Agency was to have the power to appoint Urban Development Corporations [III, I, 177 (1)]. This left the power of appointment

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<sup>95</sup> Malpass & Murie, 1990, p88.

<sup>96</sup> *Cm 2225*, 1993, §4.8, p19 + Interviews with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00, David McLetchie, 19.1.01 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>97</sup> "Campaign Guide", 1992, p251.

with the metropolitan Government, whilst releasing a lot of the responsibility and expense of housing provision into the private sector.

Another important development in this era was of the system of Citizen's Charters. One of these included a 'Householders Guide to Planning'<sup>98</sup>. The most important point here is the way in which the Major administration was perpetuating the Thatcherite programme of drawing power away from pockets of town hall socialism. In another continuation of typical Conservative practice, the Prime Minister was also keen to emphasise how this extension of choice for citizens also meant that important decisions regarding Scotland would actually be taken north of the border. This issue, which may be classified as 'low politics', had been addressed from the 1960s, when the Party was beginning to realise that there was more to the Scottish question than the constitution; and that secession might be averted by smaller incremental steps towards Devolution<sup>99</sup>.

Even though the metropolitan Government introduced tighter controls on Local Authorities in an attempt to court popularity for saving ratepayers' money, they still suffered at the polls in Scotland due to astute manoeuvres by Labour and SNP activists<sup>100</sup>. Scots were buying their Council Houses, but were also being warded off transferring their allegiance to the Conservatives. This dynamic is most interesting when examining the link between the 'POMP'

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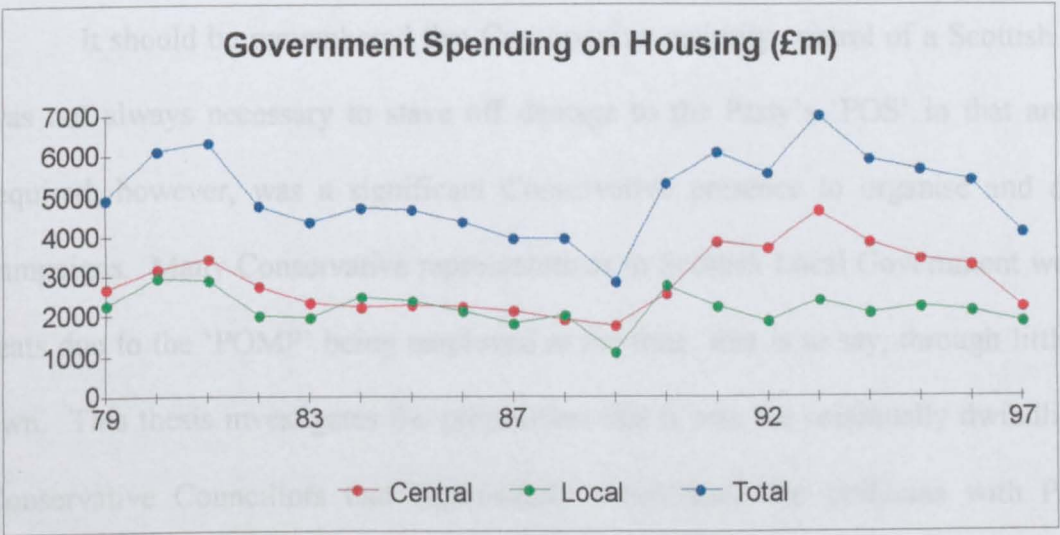
<sup>98</sup> Cm 2225, 1993, §9.4, p35 & "Campaign Guide", 1994, p485. The 'Right to Repair' had to be watered down from the Prime Minister's original design, as this would have put too much of a burden on already stretched housing finances – Hogg & Hill, 1995, p102.

<sup>99</sup> For example, "Campaign Guide", 1997, p572 + CRD 3/28/1, 1968 & CRD 3/28/6, 1968 + Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

and ‘POS.’ Initially, it would seem reasonable to assume that popular policies should lead to an improvement at the polls. As we saw in Chapter 3, the Government’s ‘Right to Buy’ scheme was as popular with Scots who could afford to participate as their English counterparts. However, the Conservatives did not enjoy a concurrent upturn in General Election fortunes north of the border. Therefore, another agency must have been at work to disrupt the desired connection between the benefits of the central housing policy and a willingness to re-align to the Conservative Party in Scotland.

I wish to contend that this extra dimension north of the border was the influence of Local Government. We have seen in this chapter how the Thatcher Administration revolutionised the way in which this branch of government had to operate. As Chart 5.1 demonstrates, the mid-1980s saw Local Government contributions to housing actually exceed those of the metropolitan Government at times.



5.1 – Sources: *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, #126, 1990, p49  
 & #134, 1998, p53.

This particular piece of ‘POMP’ may have seemed to be ideal for winning new voters, which indeed it was in England due to a relatively affluent population being able to benefit more from Income Tax cuts. However, the friction that ‘Rolling Back the State’ caused in Local Government in Scotland was to lead to more concentrated opposition north of the border than could be justified by the minimal numbers of new Conservative voters that it created there. Two links between the Conservatives’ ‘POMP’ and problems caused by Local Government in Scotland should always be kept in mind. The Party’s ‘POS’ suffered because Opposition representatives in Local Government were antagonised into orchestrating campaigns against the Conservatives. Furthermore, many of the Party’s own Local Government Election candidates were losing. This was because anyone from the Conservative Party was associated with the ‘loathsome’ administration in London<sup>101</sup>. The credibility of Opposition Councillors in Scotland allowed them to construct this perception of the Government in London in spite of some of the ‘POMP’, such as the ‘Right to Buy’, being readily accepted by Scottish voters.

It should be remembered that Conservative majority control of a Scottish Local Council was not always necessary to stave off damage to the Party’s ‘POS’ in that area. What was required, however, was a significant Conservative presence to organise and direct effective campaigns. Many Conservative representatives in Scottish Local Government were losing their seats due to the ‘POMP’ being employed at the time; that is to say, through little fault of their own. This thesis investigates the proposition that it was the continually dwindling numbers of Conservative Councillors that significantly exacerbated the problems with Party’s General Election chances north of the border.

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<sup>101</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.



## ***‘Rolling Back the State’ and the ‘POS’***

Away from the Local Government funding issue, Thatcherite economic policy could be characterised as a return to more traditional Conservative non-interventionist statecraft<sup>102</sup>. However, Local Authorities were concurrently having many of the freedoms that they had enjoyed from central control eroded<sup>103</sup>. By this time, authoritarian populism was achieving ideological hegemony in *England*<sup>104</sup>. Bradbury concludes that Thatcherism failed in Scotland mainly because its message was applied to the wrong policy areas<sup>105</sup>. Given the different kind of relationship between citizens and Local Authorities in Scotland<sup>106</sup>, it seems that these ‘POMP’ measures were very likely to cause an adverse ‘POS’ reaction north of the border.

Through the 1980s, Labour Local Authorities in Scotland were still putting up resistance. The way in which the metropolitan Government seemed to be targeting these Councils for cuts encouraged them to resist in the most effective way that they could; that is to say, by militating their constituents against the Conservatives. Due to the different structure of civil society and the political culture north of the border (as examined in Chapter 3), Opposition Councillors had sufficient credibility and influence to allow them to convince their constituents that the

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<sup>102</sup> Christopher Harris in: Brown, Philip & Sparks, Richard (eds.): “Beyond Thatcherism - Social Policy, politics and society”, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1989, p3.

<sup>103</sup> Wilson & Game, 1994, p102.

<sup>104</sup> Marsh, 1995, p597 and Andrew Gamble in: Mohan (ed.), 1989, p8.

<sup>105</sup> Bradbury, 1997, p80.

<sup>106</sup> With the voters there being more dependent on Local Government for the provision of housing and, thus, more receptive to socialist propaganda that accompanied Labour Councils in the 1980s – Interviews with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01 – this dynamic was explored more fully in Chapter 3.

Conservatives were a distant anti-Scottish absentee landlord, not worthy of their votes in Local or General Elections<sup>107</sup>.

Mrs Thatcher's Government wished to reduce public spending on housing by replacing public with private money<sup>108</sup>. Initially, the beneficial effect on the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement of such savings was the key motivation<sup>109</sup>. However, it should be noted that the Government introduced accounting procedures that made it look as though their programmes were saving more taxpayers' money than was actually the case. For example, as mortgage tax relief and Local Authority purchase discounts were not to be included in housing expenses of the central Government, they could claim to be saving money when, between 1986-1990, the exact opposite was the case and expenditure was rising<sup>110</sup>.

As Whitehead goes on to note, it was deemed easier to cut funding for housing than for any longer-term projects. Thus, housing subsidy cuts accounted for 80% of the projected cuts for 1980-1981. Housing was one of the few areas in which cuts could be made. Others included overseas aid and payments to Europe<sup>111</sup>. Riddell goes on to make the point that whenever such cuts appear, there is always party political, rather than economic, motivation behind them<sup>112</sup>. These cuts led to reductions in Local Authority building, which reached their lowest levels since 1921, and housing availability for the first time since 1919. Benefit cuts were never going to be

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01.

<sup>108</sup> Bradbury, 1997, p80.

<sup>109</sup> Malpass & Murie, 1990, p105.

<sup>110</sup> Christine Whitehead in: Cook & Crook (eds.), 1986, p87.

<sup>111</sup> Riddell, 1985, p112.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p114.

popular, especially in Scotland, where a higher proportion of the population depended on Local Government for housing provision and subsidy<sup>113</sup>. One argument put forward was that the cuts would actually cost the Government more in the long run. This was due to the expectation that poorer housing conditions would lead to deterioration in the nation's health<sup>114</sup>.

Despite the disquiet that this aspect of the 'POMP' was causing in Local Government in Scotland, the metropolitan Government saw the greater good of lowering the PSBR as sufficient justification<sup>115</sup>. Subsidy cuts are just as hard to justify to scrutinising committees at Westminster as with the electorate, Whitehead asserts<sup>116</sup>. However, Michael Heseltine was able to do so by pointing to the numbers of unoccupied buildings at the time and saying that they should be renovated, rather than pouring more taxpayers' money into new projects<sup>117</sup>. The metropolitan Government was also looking to make welfare savings and increase citizens' pride in their communities by promoting private ownership. Privatisation was popular amongst New Right Conservatives because it increased efficiency and choice. Malpass and Murie note that these measures marked an increase in housing benefit being seen as a welfare issue, with all the attached stigma in 1980s Britain<sup>118</sup>. The *Social Security & Benefits Act 1982* saw rent and Rate

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<sup>113</sup> It is interesting to note that as late as 1964, the Conservatives were still very keen for Local Authorities to play a major role in the rental sector – in: Dale (ed.), 2000, p156.

<sup>114</sup> Tony Dickson in: McCrone *et al* (eds.), 1989, p61.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Lord Mackay of Clashfern, 22.1.01. The Conservatives knew that they had to be careful with cutting housing subsidies. The *Housing Finance Act 1972* had effectively removed rent subsidies from many households. This lost the Party many votes – Dennis Kavanagh in: Seldon, Anthony (ed.): "How Tory Governments Fall – The Tory Party in Power Since 1783", London, Fontana, 1996, p370.

<sup>116</sup> In: Cook & Crook (eds.), 1986, p60.

<sup>117</sup> **HC383**, Session 1980-1981, p180.

<sup>118</sup> Malpass & Murie, 1990, p87.

rebates being amalgamated with benefit moneys for the first time<sup>119</sup>. The Thatcher Government was couching housing policy in terms of what the state could afford, rather than the more traditional housing issues of shortages and conditions. The importance of community spirit in the field of renovation as an alternative to expensive new building work is mentioned in the Party manifesto of October 1974<sup>120</sup>. This preferred 'POMP' might have been acceptable in the prosperous South East of England. In Scotland, however, it was not conforming to the constraints imposed by the dependence of many citizens on their Local Authority. As these Labour-controlled Local Authorities had the credibility to steer their constituents towards voting against the Conservatives in Local Government and General Elections, a damaging blow was being dealt to the Conservatives' 'POS' north of the border.

## ***Conclusion***

As we saw in Chapter 3, the Conservatives were looking to fare well from housing policy by being seen to give opportunities for social and financial improvement to the working class. Simultaneously, however, the metropolitan Government was pursuing its own agenda of removing as much power as possible from the hands of socialist Local Governments<sup>121</sup>. As Labour activists on the ground in Scotland were still well-received and respected, they were able to cause anti-Conservative resentment amongst the electorate by identifying policies that the metropolitan Government deemed anti-wastefulness to be anti-Scottish<sup>122</sup>.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p101.

<sup>120</sup> In: Dale (ed.), 2000, p244.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

The metropolitan Government was seeking to spread the notion of an 'Enterprise Culture' to Scotland<sup>123</sup>. However, rather than being a philanthropic venture to improve the lives of Scots, voter-friendly tax-cuts involved in 'Rolling Back the State' were more attractive to the Conservative Leadership<sup>124</sup>. Mitchell notes another potentially happy result for the Conservatives of cutting back on support for Local Authorities in the housing sector. The metropolitan Government hoped that the (mostly Labour) Councils would be forced to put up their Council House rents<sup>125</sup>. This would have helped the Conservatives to challenge their opponents' practice of 'buying' tenants' votes with low rents<sup>126</sup>. However, as Chart 5.2 shows, Local Authorities in Scotland managed to avoid putting up their rents by more than the rate of inflation. If any services had to be cut in order to keep rents down, the Labour Councils had enough credibility in their communities to be able to deflect criticism by asserting that the problems were being caused by the Conservatives' 'POMP'<sup>127</sup>.

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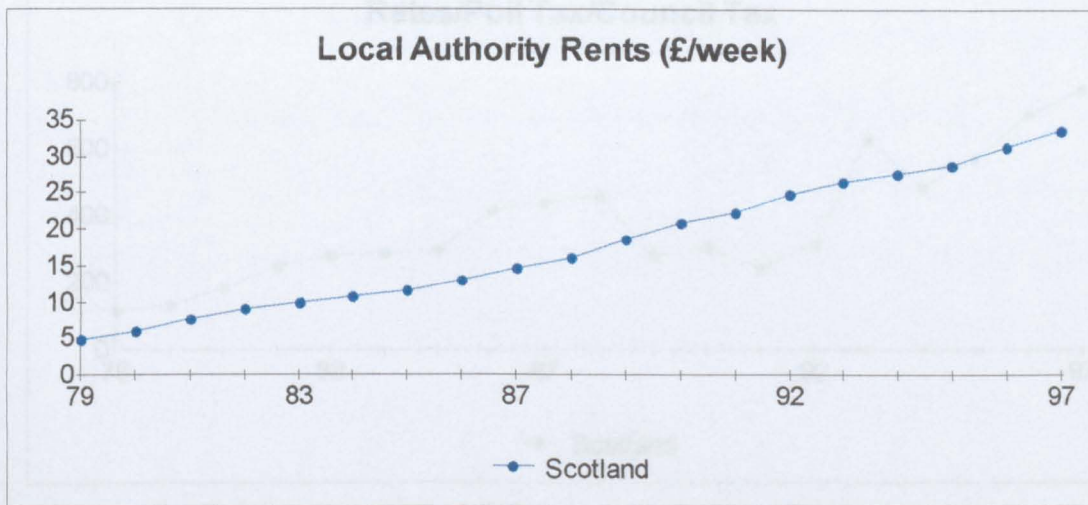
<sup>123</sup> Mitchell, 1990, p115.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

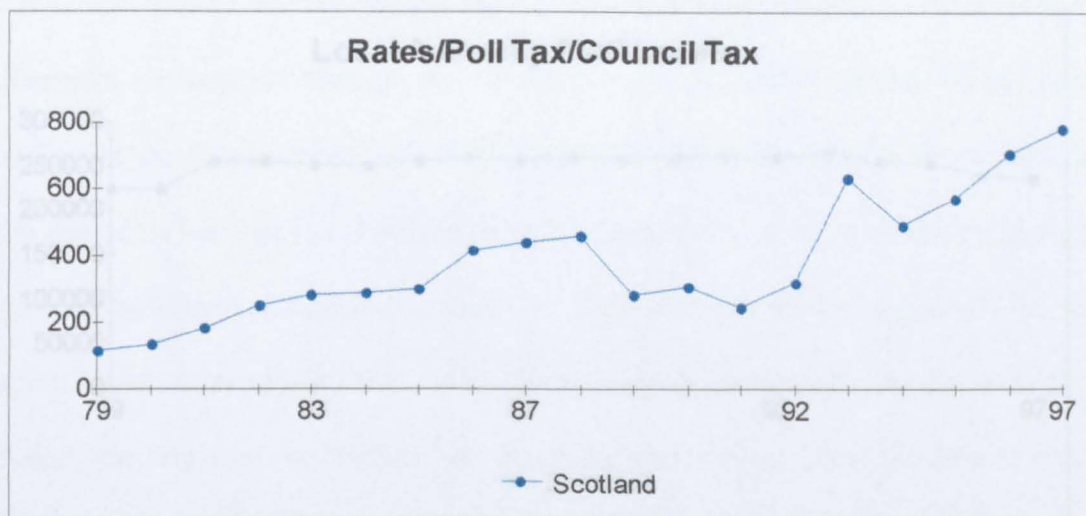


5.2 – Sources: *Regional Trends*<sup>128</sup> & *Scottish Abstract of Statistics*<sup>129</sup>.

We have also seen how metropolitan Government housing policy was designed to prevent Scottish Local Authorities from raising funds for their party political programmes through dramatic increases in Domestic Rates in the 1980s. However, as Chart 5.3 of average Scottish monthly charges demonstrates, the metropolitan Government was not able to exert as much control as they desired; above-inflation rises being evident in the mid-1980s and 1990s. If the period from 1989 to 1993 is momentarily ignored, we see that the plot from Rates to Council Tax is quite smooth and rises more steeply than the chart of Local Authority rents (Chart 5.2).

<sup>128</sup> *Regional Trends*: Number 17, 1982, p46, #18, 1983, p37, #19, 1984, p35, #20, 1985, p35, #21, 1986, p37, #22, 1987, p37, #23, 1988, p35, #24, 1989, p35, #25, 1990, p64, #26, 1991, p62, #27, 1992, p183, #28, 1993, p180, #29, 1994, p200, #30, 1995, p218, #31, 1996, p224, #32, 1997, p208 & #33, 1998, p208.

<sup>129</sup> *Scottish Abstract of Statistics*: Number 9, 1980, pp31-32, #10, 1981, p30 & #14, 1985, p49.



5.3 – Sources: *Regional Trends*<sup>130 131</sup>.

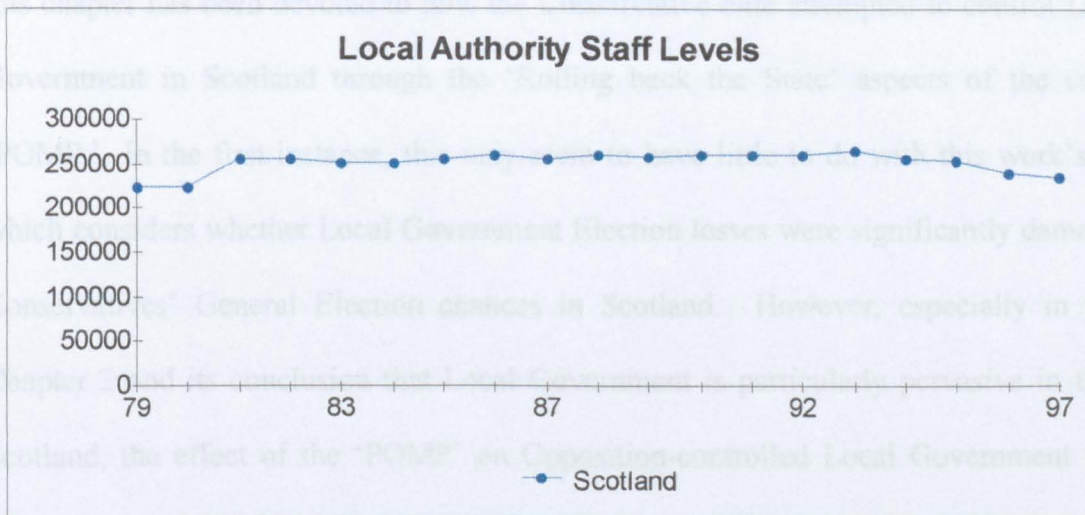
Another aspect of ‘Rolling Back the State’ that the metropolitan Governments of the 1980s tried to implement and use in a similar way was an instruction to reduce the number of Local Authority employees<sup>132</sup>. Hereby, it was hoped to further reduce costs to the taxpayers and militancy amongst public sector employees. However, as Chart 5.4 shows, Scottish Local Authorities were also able to resist this measure.

<sup>130</sup> *Regional Trends*: #16, 1981, p94, #22, 1987, p110, #26, 1991, p160, #30, 1995, p87, #31, 1996, p201, #33, 1998, p79.

<sup>131</sup> 1979-1989 = Rates per hereditament, 1990-1992 = Poll Tax per person & 1993-1997 = Council Tax per household.

<sup>132</sup> *Times*, 5.6.81, p4 & 31.8.82, p3.





5.4 – Sources: *Regional Trends*<sup>133</sup> & *Scottish Abstract of Statistics*<sup>134</sup>.

As with the housing issue, it seems that Labour Local Authorities north of the border were astute enough to circumvent the financial and operational barriers in their way. More importantly, they were also able to retain sufficient credibility in their communities to dissuade many voters who might have been tempted to re-align to the Conservatives at subsequent elections<sup>135</sup>.

Taken in conjunction with the 'Right to Buy' legislation examined earlier, this chapter shows how deeply opposed the Thatcher Administrations were to the apparent inefficiencies of Local Government from the very outset<sup>136</sup>. Furthermore, this chapter has demonstrated how the metropolitan Governments of the 1980s and 1990s tried to gain support through removing powers from Local Authorities. Rather than the actual actions of Opposition groups, much of

<sup>133</sup> *Regional Trends*: Number 16, 1981, p103 & #17, 1982, p119.

<sup>134</sup> *Scottish Abstract of Statistics*: Number 11, 1982, p63, #14, 1985, p99, #20, 1991, p110, #23, 1994, p121, #26, 1998, Internet.

<sup>135</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>136</sup> Thatcher, 1993, p32.



this chapter has been devoted to how the Conservative elite attempted to control Labour Local Government in Scotland through the 'Rolling back the State' aspects of the contemporary 'POMP.' In the first instance, this may seem to have little to do with this work's hypothesis, which considers whether Local Government Election losses were significantly damaging for the Conservatives' General Election chances in Scotland. However, especially in the light of Chapter 3 and its conclusion that Local Government is particularly pervasive in the 'POS' in Scotland, the effect of the 'POMP' on Opposition-controlled Local Government north of the border assumes significant importance.

The Opposition parties could have used Local Government in Scotland to marshal voters against the Conservatives. Therefore, an assessment had to be made of how and why they were encouraged to do so. This chapter has shown that a primary source of antagonism was contemporary Conservative 'POMP.' Therefore, another dimension of how the Conservative elite in London were harming their Party's 'POS' on the geographical periphery is suggested. As we have seen, this harm was being caused by central strategies designed to minimise the spending and political socialisation role of Local Authorities. Consequent Conservative Local Government losses would have left Labour Councillors free to establish ideological hegemony in the various regions north of the border. Furthermore, these Councillors would have been keen to exact as much damage on the central Government as possible due to the central cuts in their funding and power. Even if national issues played an important role in determining a voter's choice in a General Election, the structure of civil society, political culture and the 'POS' in Scotland suggested that the actions of Labour Local Government representatives there also assumed considerable significance.

As the data above and subsequent General Election results show, however, much of the Conservative programme was not successful in achieving its economic or political goals in Scotland. There are few examples of Local Government action being able to directly change the 'POMP.' This is due to the imbalance of power between the two levels of government. In Scotland, however, it seems that the more the metropolitan administration tried to impose financial controls from London, the more that Labour Local Government representatives strove to convince their constituents of the need to vote against the Conservatives in Local Government and General Elections. As this thesis seeks to demonstrate, it seems that especially as the numbers of Conservative Local Government representatives in Scotland began to drop as a result of this reaction to the 'POMP', the Party's 'POS' began to fail to a critical degree north of the border.

The next chapter of this thesis examines the effects of the dynamics that we have explored to date on a specific area of Scotland. Through this study of the interaction between local governance and the 'POMP' in Stirling, we will be able to see more clearly just how the 'POS' seemed to be run in Scotland.

## ***6. The 'POMP', Local Government and the 'Politics of Support' in Stirling 1979-1997***

### ***Introduction***

The purpose of this chapter is to assess how the relationship between the 'POMP' and Local Government impacted on a particular area of Scotland. Thereby, it will be possible to better appreciate how the loss of representation in Local Government could have affected the Conservatives north of the border. Stirling has been chosen as the subject of this case study due to its demographic nature and party political history. Both the Westminster seat and the Local Council were very closely contested throughout the era in question. Such rivalry on a local level helps to highlight the particular dynamics under investigation in this thesis. That is to say, how highly active members of Local Government from the major parties in Scotland can serve to help or hinder the chances of Westminster candidates in their area through organising support, electoral campaigns or opposition to the 'POMP.'

Therefore, the first task is to profile the population of the area in order to understand why and how the major parties may have appealed to the electorate. This is followed by an account of the 'POMP' and local issues that influenced the course of national and Local Government Elections and Local Authority actions during the era in question. From previous chapters in this thesis, we have learned that the issues of subsidy cuts, central control of Local Government and the Poll Tax should be of key interest here. The roles and influence of both levels of government in Stirling are brought to light in this chapter, thus facilitating a conclusion regarding the defeat

of the Conservative General Election candidate there in 1997. This loss could have happened in 1987 or 1992, given the unpopularity of the Party in Scotland, vigorous campaigning by Labour Councillors and marginal nature of the seat. However, Conservative representation in Local Government in the area was strong at these times. It was only after a 30% drop in Conservative members of Stirling Council that their MP was ousted. It is the purpose of this piece to assess whether there was any causal link between these two events.

### ***Demographic Profile of Stirling***

The District of Stirling is in central Scotland, to the north of Edinburgh and Glasgow. It covers an area of nearly 2200 square kilometres and had a population of 83580 in 1997<sup>1</sup>. Population is sparse at 38/km<sup>2</sup>, denoting the rural nature of much of the land. It should be noted, however, that few of the population are employed in agriculture. The service sector and tourism are more important, as can be seen in the charts of industries of employment (6.2 and 6.3). The Central Region of Scotland used to be industrialised, with coal and steel formerly being important to the economy. Stirling is also an important transport node, being the highest tidal/lowest bridgeable point on the Forth. If not engaged in the service sector, agriculture, tourism or the light industry of the region, many inhabitants commute to Glasgow or Edinburgh.

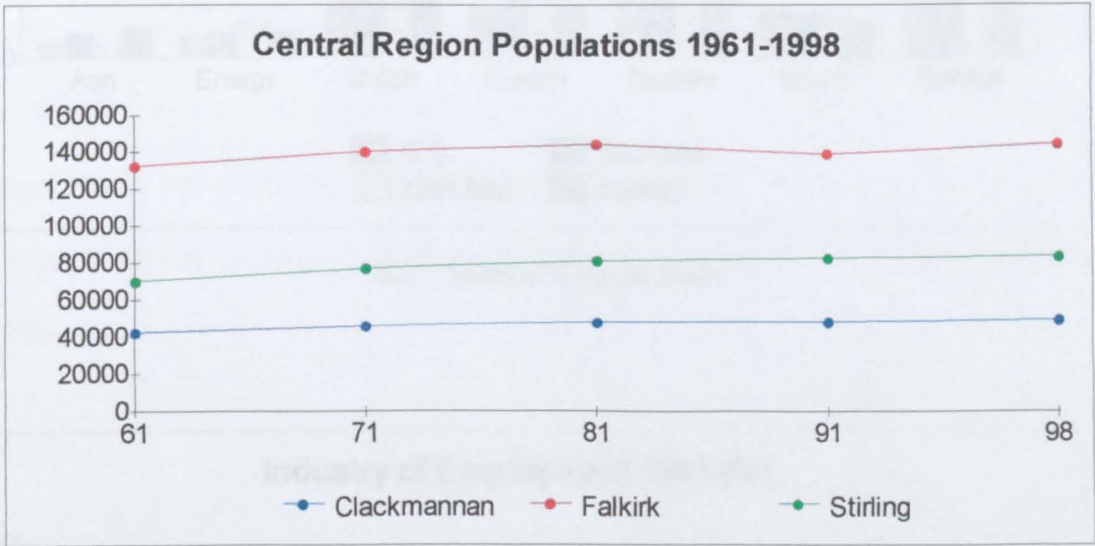
Traditionally, the Conservatives would expect to fare well in the rural parts of such an area<sup>2</sup>. Potential for Conservative success is further suggested by the above-average proportion of older people in the district (17.8%). The district's total population grew by 4.1% between 1981-

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<sup>1</sup> Regional Trends, Number 34, 1999, p205.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, 25.1.01 & Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

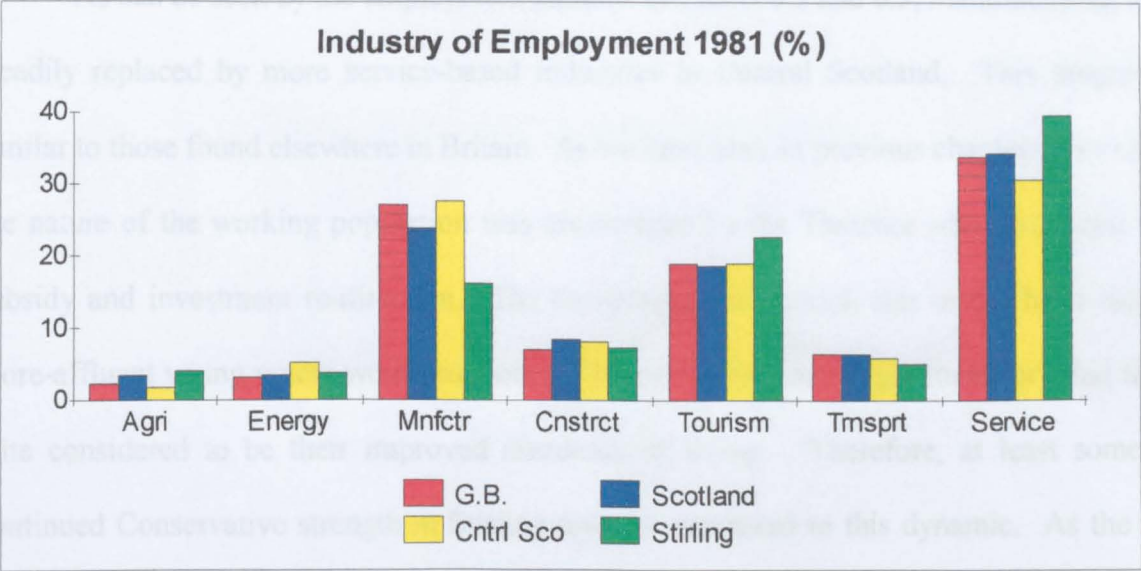
1997. This figure was only significantly bettered by Aberdeen, the Lothians and East Renfrewshire; and was high compared to the Scottish average of  $-1.1\%$ <sup>3</sup>. Stirling is the administrative centre, with other significant towns being Falkirk, Dunblane and Callander.



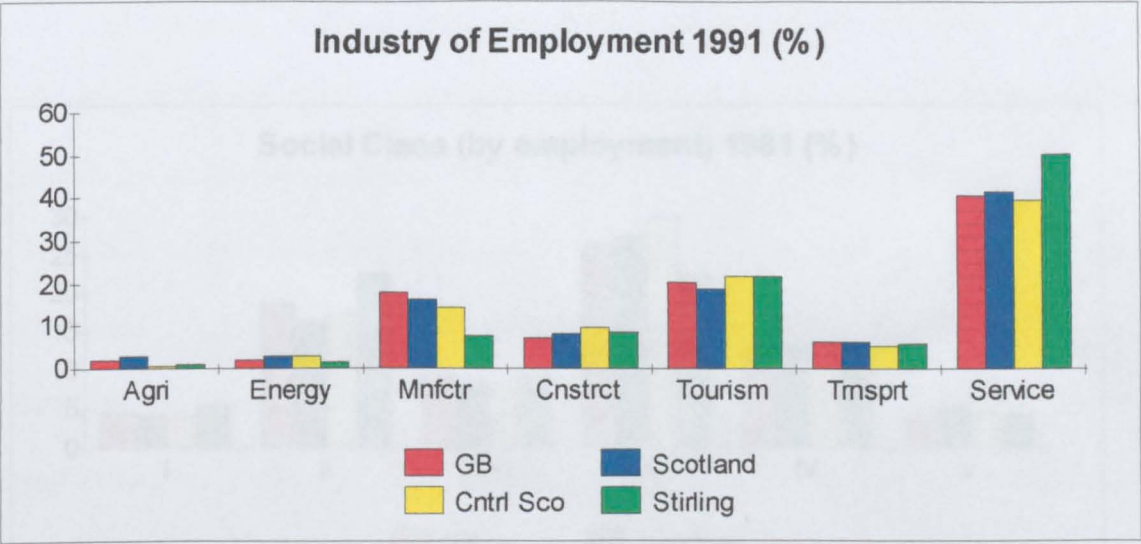
6.1 – Sources: *Census Data*<sup>4</sup> & *Regional Trends*, Number 34, 1999, p205.

<sup>3</sup> *Regional Trends*, Number 34, 1999, p205.

<sup>4</sup> 1981: *Report for Central Region – Vol. 1*, p xxiv + *Scottish Summary*, p1.  
1991: *Central Region Report*, Part 1, p16 + *Report for Scotland – Part 1, Vol. 1*, p47.



6.2 – Source: Census Data<sup>5</sup>.



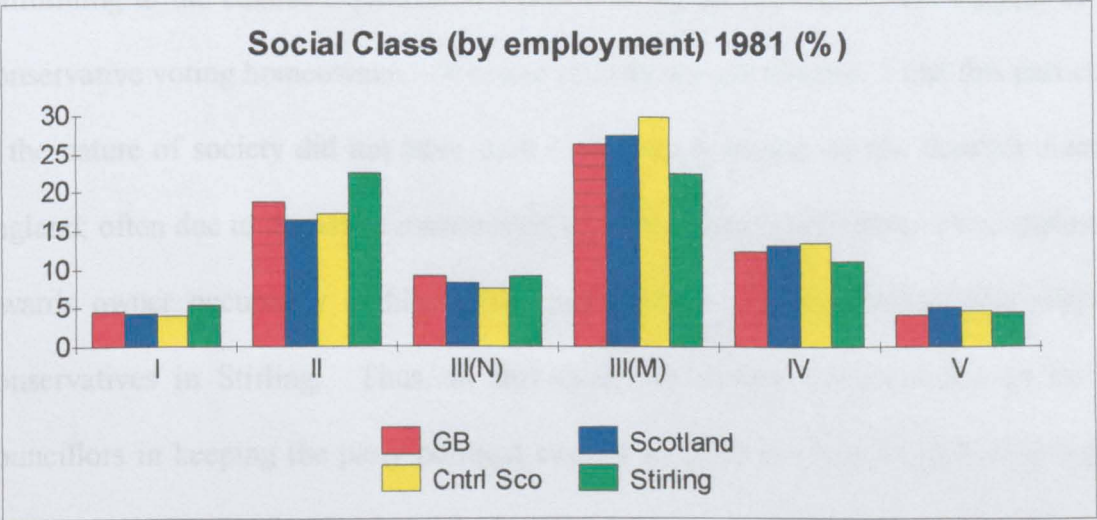
6.3 – Source: Census Data<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> 1981: Key Statistics for local authorities. Great Britain, p70.

<sup>6</sup> 1991: Key Statistics for Localities in Scotland, p133.



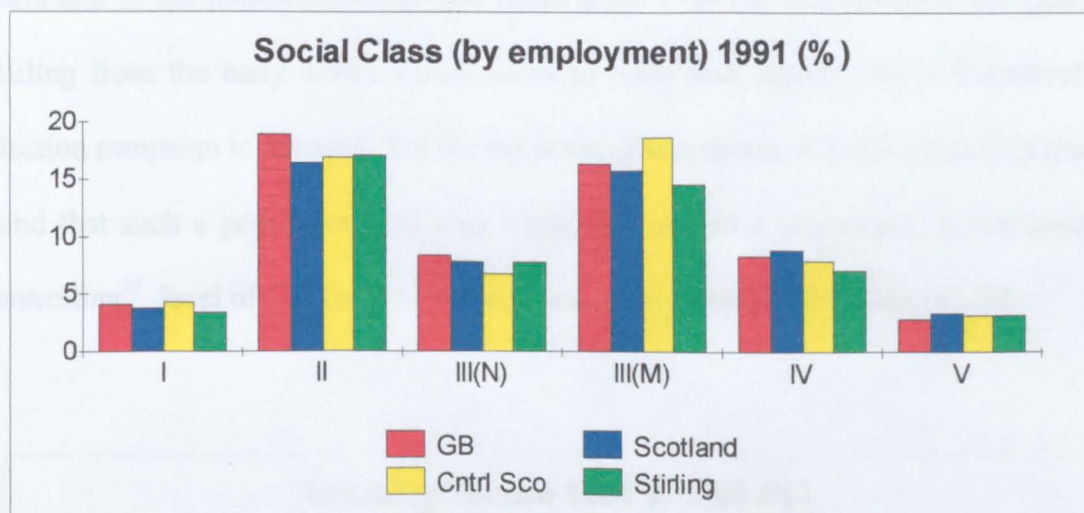
As can be seen by the employment patterns in Charts 6.2 and 6.3, manufacturing has been steadily replaced by more service-based industries in Central Scotland. This progression is similar to those found elsewhere in Britain. As we have seen in previous chapters, this change in the nature of the working population was encouraged by the Thatcher administrations through subsidy and investment re-direction. The Government undertook this in the hope that newly more-affluent young voters would support the Conservatives out of gratitude for what the Party elite considered to be their improved standards of living<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, at least some of the continued Conservative strength in Stirling must be attributed to this dynamic. As the data on social class in Charts 6.4 and 6.5 confirms, the region was moving away from the predominance of III (Manual).



6.4 – Source: Census Data<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with David McLetchie, 19.1.01, Lord MacKay of Clashfern, 22.1.01 & Viscount Younger, 14.2.01.

<sup>8</sup> 1981: Key Statistics for local authorities. Great Britain, p42.



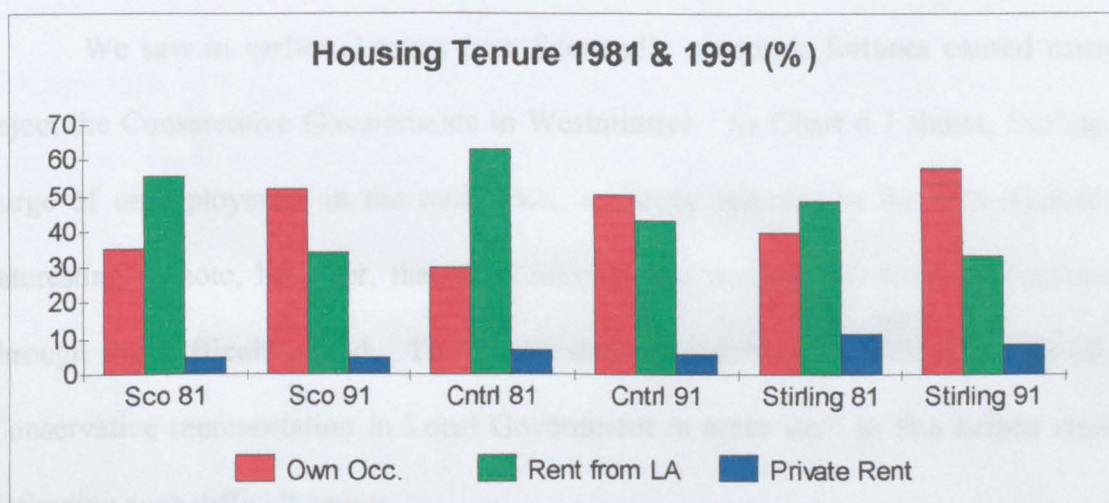
6.5 – Source: Census Data<sup>9</sup>.

The changing divisions in housing tenure (see Chart 6.6) also show that the area was conforming to the central Government's desire to see an increase in the number of potentially Conservative voting homeowners. We have already seen in Chapter 3 that this particular change in the nature of society did not have such a significant impact on the Scottish electorate as in England; often due to the astute manoeuvres of Labour local politicians. Nevertheless, the move towards owner occupancy highlights the possibility of some potential new support for the Conservatives in Stirling. Thus, in this case, we should recognise the efforts of Labour Councillors in keeping the party political contest so close in circumstances that suggested that the area could have become a Scottish stronghold for the Conservatives. Labour local politicians tried to keep the voters that they had previously 'bought off' with cheap rents<sup>10</sup>. To do this, they endeavoured to convince the electorate that any perceived improved standards of living were

<sup>9</sup> 1991: Key Statistics for Localities in Scotland, pp98-99.



nothing to do with the 'Right to Buy'<sup>11</sup>; or, if they were, that it was Labour efforts over previous years and in the transition period that made it so<sup>12</sup>. In the first instance, the gentrification of Stirling from the early 1980s would seem to bode well directly for a Conservative General Election campaign in the area. For the purposes of this thesis, it is also most important to bear in mind that such a population was also likely to maintain a significant, if not always Council-controlling<sup>13</sup>, level of Conservative representation in Local Government as well.



6.6 – Sources: Census Data<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Lord Sanderson, 30.11.00.

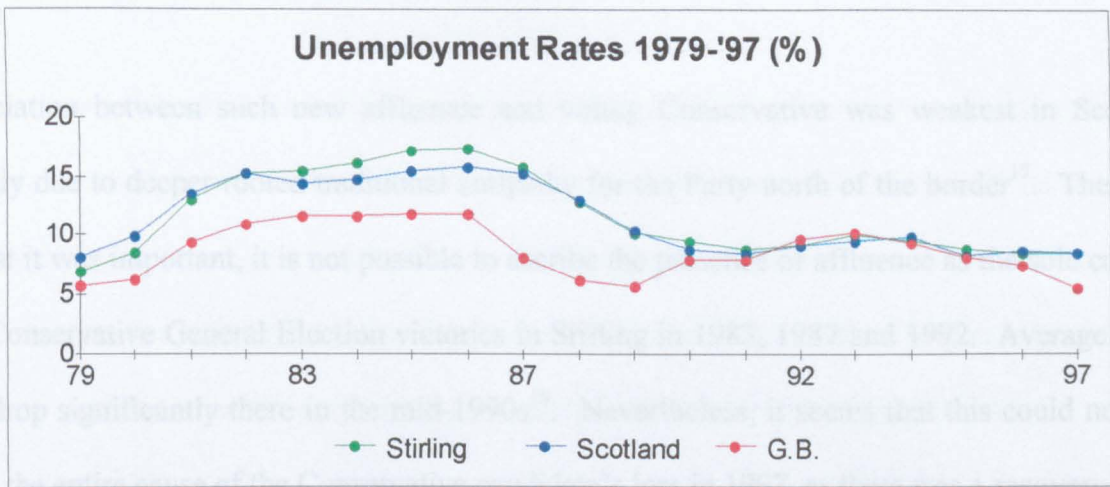
<sup>11</sup> Interview with David McLetchie, 19.1.01.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>13</sup> This work's hypothesis does not rely on Conservatives being in control of Local Councils – but only that they have at least a sufficient level of representation to challenge the other parties and organise and give direction to voters.

<sup>14</sup> 1981: Report for Central Region – Vol.1, p xxvii.

1991: Report for Central Region – Vol. 1, p22 + Housing & Availability of Cars, p268.



6.7 – Sources: *Scottish Abstract of Statistics*<sup>15</sup> and *Regional Trends*<sup>16</sup>.

We saw in earlier chapters how Scotland’s economic fortunes caused many voters to reject the Conservative Governments in Westminster. As Chart 6.7 shows, Stirling suffered a surge of unemployment in the mid-1980s, as heavy industry in the area deteriorated. It is interesting to note, however, that the Conservatives managed to hold the Parliamentary seat through this difficult period. This thesis seeks to establish that the presence of substantial Conservative representation in Local Government in areas such as this helped significantly in defending such difficult causes.

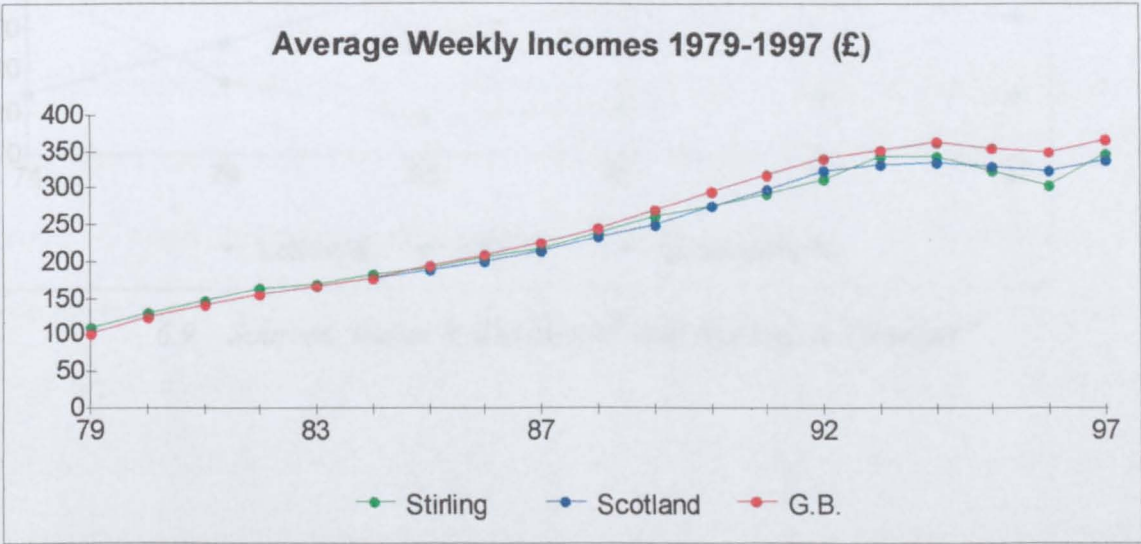
It should be noted that, as Chart 6.8 shows, average incomes amongst those who remained in employment in the Stirling area were rising and often above the Scottish average during the 1980s. Therefore, metropolitan economic policies were having the desired effect of creating more potential Conservative voters; who might be prepared to reward the Government for their newly-found affluence. As we saw with regard to the ‘Right to Buy’, however, the

<sup>15</sup> *Scottish Abstract of Statistics*: Number 12, 1983, p71, #14, 1985, p117, #20, 1991, p123, #23, 1994, p131.

<sup>16</sup> *Regional Trends*: Number 32, 1997, p209, #33, 1998, p209.



association between such new affluence and voting Conservative was weakest in Scotland; mainly due to deeper-rooted traditional antipathy for the Party north of the border<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, whilst it was important, it is not possible to ascribe the presence of affluence as the sole cause of the Conservative General Election victories in Stirling in 1983, 1987 and 1992. Average wages did drop significantly there in the mid-1990s<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, it seems that this could not have been the entire cause of the Conservative candidate's loss in 1997, as there was a recovery before the election. What is significant, however, is that the presence of a relatively large proportion of affluent voters kept the Conservative representation in Local Government in the area at a relatively high level for Scotland until 1995. It is only after this representation at the local level dropped that the Parliamentary seat was lost.



6.8 – Source: *Regional Trends*<sup>19</sup>.

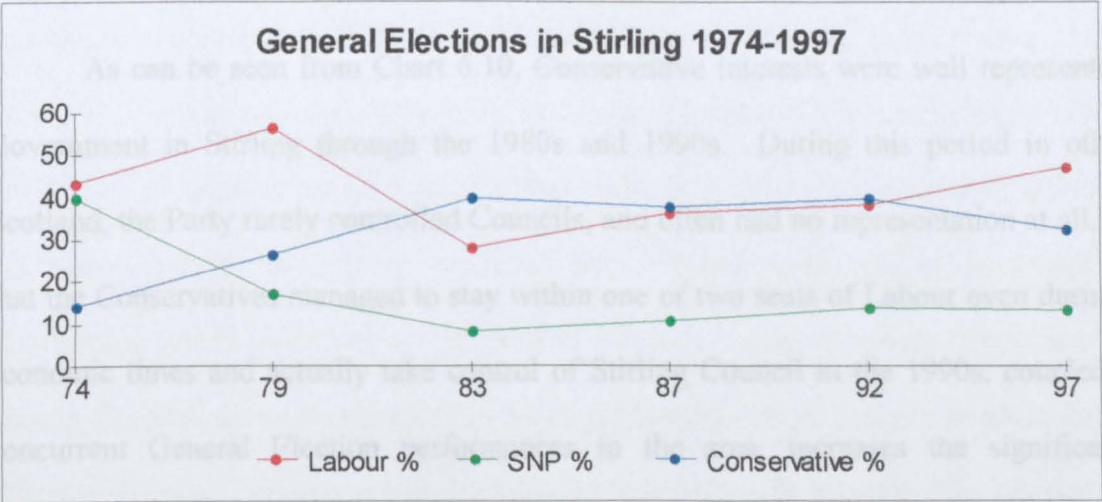
<sup>17</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01.

<sup>18</sup> See Chart 6.8.

<sup>19</sup> *Regional Trends*: Number 15, 1980, pp31-32, #16, 1981, pp30-31, #17, 1982, p46, #18, 1983, p37, #19, 1984, p35, #20, 1985, p35, #21, 1986, p37, #22, 1987, p37, #23, 1988, p35, #24, 1989, p35, #25, 1990, p35, #26, 1991, p33, #27, 1992, p183, #28, 1993, p183, #29, 1994, p200, #30, 1995, p218, #31, 1996, p224, #32, 1997, p208, #33, 1998, p208.

Now, an analysis of the party political history of Stirling during the era in question will further demonstrate how the various dynamics explored in this thesis impacted on a precise, closely contested local polity in Scotland. We are particularly interested in Local Government related factors that could have led to the defeat of the Conservative MP or helped Labour to keep the party political contest close in such an ostensibly affluent and Conservative area.

**Party Politics in Stirling 1979-1997**

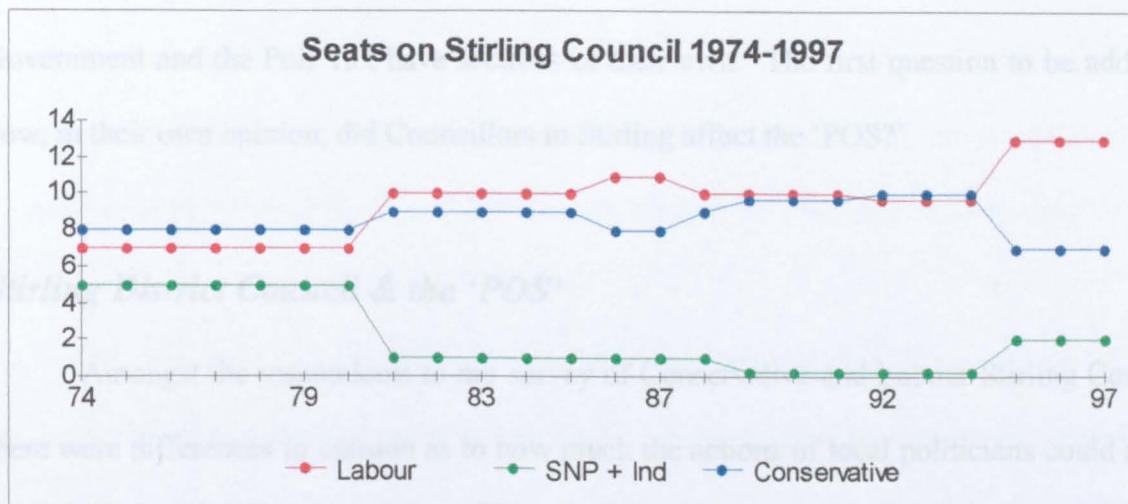


6.9 – Sources: Butler & Kavanagh<sup>20</sup> and Rallings & Thrasher<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Butler & Kavannagh, 1975, p323; 1980; p382 & 1997, p285. NB boundary changes before the 1983 General Election removed many urban Labour voters from the constituency – Waller, Robert: “The Almanac of British Politics – 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.”, London, Routledge, 1983, p546. Therefore, the 1974 and 1979 results shown in Chart 6.9 would have been closer had the seat been contested within the post 1983 boundaries.

<sup>21</sup> Rallings, Colin & Thrasher, Michael (eds.): “British Parliamentary Election Results 1983-1992”, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999, p303.





6.10 – Sources: *Municipal Yearbook & Public Services Directory*<sup>22</sup>

As can be seen from Chart 6.10, Conservative interests were well represented in Local Government in Stirling through the 1980s and 1990s. During this period in other parts of Scotland, the Party rarely controlled Councils, and often had no representation at all. Therefore, that the Conservatives managed to stay within one or two seats of Labour even during the worst economic times and actually take control of Stirling Council in the 1990s, coupled with good concurrent General Election performances in the area, increases the significance of the proposition in my hypothesis. That is to say, that Conservative General Election chances in Scotland were somewhat dependent on levels of Party Local Government representation. Significant personalities and events in Stirling will be examined in the rest of this chapter to assess how the dynamics in question impacted upon the Local Government and General Election results of the area. Whilst these following sections are mainly chronological in nature, emphasis is put on aspects of the ‘POMP’ that earlier chapters have identified as especially contentious in Scotland during the era in question. Hence, the topics of subsidy cuts, central control of Local

Government and the Poll Tax have sections of their own. The first question to be addressed is how, in their own opinion, did Councillors in Stirling affect the 'POS'?

### ***Stirling District Council & the 'POS'***

Amongst the respondents to my survey of Conservative and Labour Stirling Councillors, there were differences in opinion as to how much the actions of local politicians could affect the General Election vote of a constituent. None of the Conservative Stirling Councillors surveyed believed that their actions on a local level could completely overturn the voting habit of a committed constituent in General Elections<sup>23</sup>. Nonetheless, the Conservatives did agree that their effectiveness and approachability as Local Councillors did have a slight role to play in confirming or undermining a voter's initial inclinations about an upcoming General Election. All respondents to the survey conceded that national issues played an important role in determining Local Government and General Election voting intention. Importantly, however, Labour Councillors were considerably more prepared to assert that the conduct, behaviour and efficacy of Local Councillors were significant with regard to how constituents would vote in a General Election. This demonstrates a seemingly better understanding of how the Scottish 'POS' works than held by their Conservative counterparts.

The Conservatives did agree that it is especially important for Councillors to remain as accessible and helpful as possible in order to preserve the loyalty of current Conservative voters and stimulate an atmosphere of trust, gratitude and respect for the Party amongst the electorate as

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<sup>22</sup> *Municipal Yearbook & Public Services Directory*: 1975, p1386; 1978, p1275; 1982, p1428; 1984, p1496; 1986, p1451; 1988, p1559; 1991, p790; 1993, p785; 1998, p701 & 2001, p1461.

a whole. In other words, if a voter is undecided just before a General Election, the local Conservative Councillors hope that their proficiency may persuade the constituent that the Conservative Party might be able to deliver such benefits on a national scale as well<sup>24</sup>.

We have seen earlier in this thesis how increased emphasis on community in Scotland has indeed rendered the work of Local Councillors important and likely to attract support for their party. The less pro-active attitude adopted by Conservative Councillors seems to have hurt the Party's 'POS' in Scotland. However, such reluctance on the local level during the 1980s and 1990s seems understandable in the hostile Scottish environment caused by the Conservative 'POMP' and long-standing antipathy for the Party. Before examining the effect of actual policies, it is useful to build up a profile of the prominent actors and prevailing attitudes in Stirling from the early 1980s. Such factors are critical for all parties when trying to establish ideological hegemony and successful 'POS.'

### ***Key Actors & Attitudes in Stirling***

Dennis Canavan was the Labour MP for the Stirling area at the start of the 1980s. He relied on support in industrial towns such as Kilsyth, Denny and Dunipace. When boundary changes transferred these towns to other constituencies, the Stirling seat became more rural in nature. Rural areas such as Kinross and West Perthshire had always been good for the Conservatives (Alec Douglas-Home had been MP there). Sensing that his support base had

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<sup>23</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid (Con).

gone, Canavan moved to stand in Falkirk West in 1983, thus allowing the Thatcherite Michael Forsyth to win the first General Election for the new Stirling seat in 1983<sup>25</sup>.

Forsyth was a young (29) Thatcherite<sup>26</sup> at the time and made his feelings about Local Government known very quickly. He ran for the Westminster seat against the then Leader of the Council, Michael Connerty. Connerty was described as being akin to Ken Livingstone, with high public spending and pro trade union views<sup>27</sup>. This was completely opposite to Forsyth's character. He had served on Westminster Council and wanted to see similar cost-saving practices copied in Scotland. Indeed, the Conservative group on Stirling Council went on to assume the mantle of a Wandsworth or Westminster of the north; where public spending thriftiness was a watchword<sup>28</sup>. It is interesting to note that this stand as the 'standard bearers' of right wing policies in Scotland may have cost the Conservatives in the 1995 Local Government Election<sup>29</sup>. This thesis investigates whether such Local Government election losses were dangerous for the Party's General Election prospects north of the border.

Throughout the 1980s, the two sides on Stirling Council were openly hostile<sup>30</sup>. This situation was exemplified by Forsyth's decision to take Connerty to court for an injunction against the Labour group's policy of putting Trade Union officials on the Council's Policy

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<sup>25</sup> Waller, 1983, p546.

<sup>26</sup> A characteristic that led to notable polarisation within the community – Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>27</sup> Times, 20.5.83, p4.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>29</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* (Con).



Committee<sup>31</sup>. Forsyth continued to try to discredit and block central funding for civic and social policy projects instituted by the Labour-controlled Council<sup>32</sup>. Thus, we have a clear example of open antagonism between central and Local Government in Stirling. The key question is how did this affect the 'POS?'

As the 1980s progressed, apart from the Viewforth area, the town of Stirling was still inclined towards Labour. Otherwise, the Westminster constituency, including the rural regions of the Trossachs, Callander and Loch Tay, in addition to the small affluent towns in the north-east, such as Dunblane, was mainly in favour of the Conservatives. However, some of these Conservative areas, such as the Bridge of Allan, in the Airthrey ward, which was moved into the Ochil constituency, were being transferred out of Stirling by boundary changes. Therefore, Local Government and General Elections in the Stirling constituency were still destined to be very close<sup>33</sup>. As can be seen from the General Election results in Chart 6.9, the Conservatives did well in Stirling during the 1980s; a feat rarely achieved elsewhere in Scotland. Even from 1983-1987 and 1987-1992, when the Party was doing particularly badly north of the border only, the Stirling MP seemed to be somewhat immune, in spite of an unemployment rate higher than the Scottish average. The question must be asked whether this success was due in any part to the dynamics of Local Government in the area?

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<sup>31</sup> Stirling Observer, 15.10.82, p1 & Times, 20.5.83, p4.

<sup>32</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>33</sup> Waller, Robert & Criddle, Bryan: "The Almanac of British Politics – 5<sup>th</sup> Ed.", London, Routledge, 1996, pp772-773.

The original Parliamentary constituency included the towns of Stirling, Falkirk, Grangemouth Burgh and the rural districts of West Stirlingshire, Kinross and West Perthshire. The urban areas, as in the rest of Scotland, were traditionally inclined towards Labour. Labour had usually been able to dominate Local Government Elections in these areas. As we have already introduced, and very importantly for this thesis, this situation led to antagonism with the Conservative metropolitan Government on several occasions. For example, the Council showed open defiance for the Government by allowing its vehicles to display CND stickers<sup>34</sup>. This matter may seem petty. However, it is a good demonstration of how Local Authorities can highlight and/or criticise the 'POMP', thus potentially affecting voting patterns at subsequent General Elections. The nuclear issue is important in Stirling due to use of the Forth by naval vessels. Therefore, the Conservative countermeasure of sponsoring a Trident submarine in the Council's name when they were in control some ten years later made a very symbolic gesture and supportive comment for the contemporary 'POMP'<sup>35</sup>. Now we shall examine the impact on Stirling of programmes from the 'POMP' that were particularly contentious in Scotland. Hereby, we will be able to assess how the Conservatives fared in the 'POS' in one of the few regions of Scotland where they enjoyed substantial Local Government representation.

### ***Stirling District Council and the 'POMP'***

#### ***- Subsidy Cuts in Stirling***

Any actions undertaken by the Labour group in Stirling during the 1980s would seem to have been futile, as the Conservative MP was not ousted. However, the demographic and

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<sup>34</sup> Times, 19.4.82, p2.

economic circumstances of the area suggest that the Conservatives could have been in a much stronger position than they were. It can be argued that Stirling could have been a stronghold in Scotland for the Conservatives. However, the Westminster seat was always highly marginal. This thesis contends that it was the following actions of the Labour urban Councillors that facilitated such a close contest. Furthermore, the continued efforts of the Conservative group helped to marshal the votes of the various more affluent communities of the area. Indeed, without such strong local Conservative organisation in Stirling, the Westminster seat could still have been lost, as were other affluent areas in Scotland where Party Local Government representation was not strong enough to withstand Labour campaigning.

As the Stirling Observer noted in the early Thatcher years, the area was going to be seriously affected by subsidy cuts. In keeping with its main target readership in the town of Stirling, this newspaper seemed to lean to the left when reporting the difficulty that Local Authorities faced in lobbying the Westminster Government against funding cuts through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities<sup>36</sup>. Examples of this were when the newspaper proclaimed that a happy New Year was unlikely in 1980 in the face of the proposed cuts<sup>37</sup> and how it foresaw £1.5m worth of education funding cuts, which were likely to lead to the closure of local schools<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

<sup>36</sup> 15.6.79, p1.

<sup>37</sup> 4.1.80, p1.

<sup>38</sup> 25.1.80, p1.

The Stirling Observer argued that the Government in Westminster was not acting with maximum sensitivity towards the Stirling region as the administration bedded in. This was highlighted in a report on how the area was no longer receiving Department of Industry or Scottish Tourist Board subsidies since 'special area' status had been removed (somewhat arbitrarily, it is suggested<sup>39</sup>). Lending more credence to the argument that the Thatcher administration was ignorant of, and insensitive to, the special circumstances of the area, the newspaper also makes great play of the way in which the metropolitan Government had erroneously classified Stirling as being in the same region as Perth<sup>40</sup>. Such insensitivity on the part of the Government was severely criticised by the Labour group on Stirling Council. The Labour Councillors claimed more of a democratic mandate as they had been elected by the citizens of the area and listened to these voters' opinions more closely through institutions such as the Stirling Assembly, the Area Forum and samples of Council House tenants<sup>41</sup>. Even though the new Parliamentary seat was to be taken by the Conservatives in 1983, an anti-Conservative tone in the media was consistent with the ideas of Labour representatives in Local Government. Consequently, building any sort of stable 'POS' would have been harder for the Conservatives than might have been expected in a region that was as pre-disposed towards them as any in Scotland<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> 2.7.82, p1 – 5500 residents had lost their jobs in Stirling as a result of this re-classification of the area. See also Stirling Observer, 16.7.82, p1, where Secretary of State Younger comes under attack for having removed 'special area' status from the region – a policy consistent with the Conservatives' commitment to unitary governance.

<sup>40</sup> Stirling Observer, 16.7.82, p1.

<sup>41</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with William Paterson, 13.9.01.

By virtue of their ongoing subsidy policy, the metropolitan Government in London did nothing to cultivate a usual source of support in the Stirling area. Rural areas were struggling in the economic climate of the mid-1980s. However, rather than subsidising farmers after poor weather, the metropolitan Government decided to try to introduce small and medium sized businesses into the countryside. This may have made financial sense, but did not win them support amongst traditionally Conservative farming communities and allowed opposition voices in Local Government to point to more regional insensitivity in the 'POMP'<sup>43</sup>.

Although it is important to note that there was no apparent immediate General Election benefits for the Labour group in Stirling from these incidents, such friction caused by the 'POMP' could often be stored up and used when evidence against an uncaring distant Conservative administration was needed<sup>44</sup>. Thereby, the 'POMP' could be harming the chances of Conservative Local Government Election candidates. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that any such consequent Local Government Election losses jeopardised the chances of Scottish Conservative Westminster candidates. As we saw in Chapter 5 of this thesis, the Conservative Governments in Westminster were keen to 'Roll Back the State' and keep very firm control of Local Government finances. The next section of this chapter examines how this dynamic affected Local Government and the 'POS' in Stirling.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 30.8.85, p1 & 6.12.85, p1.

<sup>44</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

## ***- Central Control of Local Government in Stirling***

This ongoing centre-periphery issue in the 1980s demonstrated how the metropolitan Government did not seem to be giving sufficient consideration to the possibility that their policies might be damaging Conservative Local Government candidates and representatives in Scotland. As we saw in Chapter 5, George Younger targeted Stirling for a £1.2m penalty in their subsidies due to alleged over-spending. The Labour group on Stirling Council did not have the statutory power to completely disobey the metropolitan Government. However, it did have enough credibility in the local community to be able to make great political capital from their opinion that the Secretary of State was just looking to court votes by forcing a reduction in Domestic Rates. Labour claimed that the central Government was doing this with no apparent concern for the consequent reductions in local services<sup>45</sup>. It is also interesting to note that a similar situation in Edinburgh had not been met with the same punitive response from London, as the Edinburgh Council had QC's opinion that such central policies were unjustified. However, as Stirling Council did not seem to be preparing any such legal challenges, the metropolitan Government felt safe in carrying on<sup>46</sup>.

Labour were able to voice their dissenting opinions effectively through the seemingly willing Stirling Observer. As we saw in Chapter 3, use of the local media in this way was of key importance to controlling the 'POS' in Scotland. Labour seemed to be more aware of this powerful tool and used it more effectively during the era in question<sup>47</sup>. The report on the £1.2m penalty goes on not only to question how the Secretary of State can justify the number of public

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<sup>45</sup> Stirling Observer, 30.7.82, p2.

<sup>46</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

sector redundancies that would result from his dictate, but also whether indeed the Conservative Government in London has a legitimate mandate to impose such decisions on Scotland? Thus, it is possible to see how Labour voices in Stirling would be clearly heard in the local community. Despite such opposition at the local level, however, the Government in London were able to effectively coerce the Council into cutting its rates by 4% in order to avoid further penalties<sup>48</sup>.

The continuing antagonism between the Labour-controlled Council and the Conservative central Government was demonstrated when the Council was involved in a legal case concerning its Trade Union policies. The Council wished to blacklist any firms who failed to give assurances about not crossing picket lines in the miners' strike. The Court of Session issued an interim interdict against this policy, which contravened the metropolitan Government's apparent anti-union stance<sup>49</sup>. This is another example of Local Government in Scotland being unable to damage the Government directly, but being able to claim some success insofar as they were able to rally some anti-Conservative feeling amongst the electorate for future Local Government and General Elections, thanks to a particular local issue.

Nonetheless, the metropolitan Government still had the power to impose its will on any dissenting Local Authority. This was further demonstrated to Stirling Council when the Court of Session ordered them to cut their Rates again in 1985 as a result of a default order taken out by George Younger. As was noted in Chapter 5, Labour Local Authorities preferred to take as much money as possible from their Rate Funds to maintain their Housing Revenue Accounts, as

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid (Con).

<sup>48</sup> Stirling Observer, 6.8.82, p1.

this would facilitate the minimisation of Council House rents, thus encouraging the electoral support of grateful tenants. In 1985, Stirling wanted £3.197m of such money, whilst the metropolitan Government wanted, and got, an upper limit of £2.026m<sup>50</sup>. Consequently, the District Council had to put up its rents by £2/week in order, it argued, to subsidise potential Conservative-voting property-owning ratepayers<sup>51</sup>. Even though the Conservative metropolitan Government could argue that it was taking the measure in order to protect jobs, Labour Local Government in Stirling was still able to gain a 'POS' victory by 'selling' the rent rises as a central imposition that they would rather not have undertaken.

As the local MP, Michael Forsyth complained frequently at the Local Authority's record over housing provision. The Labour-controlled Council's reply was dismissive insofar as it argued that he had no right to interfere in Local Government business anyway<sup>52</sup>. Such defiance was usually ineffective in preventing central Government intervention. For example, the metropolitan Government went ahead with plans to increase the use the private sector to administrate the sale of Council Houses in Stirling, despite stringent opposition from the Council Labour group<sup>53</sup>. This was a metropolitan Conservative attempt to cut costs and minimise the electors' association between better housing and Labour Councils. Nonetheless, even though they had little statutory power against the metropolitan administration, the issue did build up the

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<sup>49</sup> Times, 24.12.84, p2.

<sup>50</sup> Stirling Observer, 5.7.85, p1.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 19.7.85, p1 & Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>52</sup> Stirling Observer, 20.9.85, p1.

<sup>53</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.



Labour Local Authority's reputation as the defender of local interest; thus rendering the Conservatives' 'POS' somewhat weaker<sup>54</sup>.

It is interesting to note that some parts of the Scottish media at the time were making the connection between strong Local Government representation and General Election chances. For example, the Glasgow Herald notes that it would be much harder for Michael Forsyth to hold such a marginal seat as Stirling if Labour were to do well in imminent Local Government Elections<sup>55</sup>. This understanding corresponds with the characterisation of Scottish political culture made earlier in this thesis. However, there seems to have been no major direct response by the Conservative elite; even if Michael Forsyth did make the effort to travel from London to vote in the 1988 Local Government Election<sup>56</sup>. As we have already seen, the Poll Tax was to dominate central-Local Government relations at the end of the 1980s. Its divisive effects were felt in Stirling and must be examined now in order to assess the policy's effect on the Conservatives' 'POS' in this region of Scotland.

### ***- The Poll Tax in Stirling***

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the Poll Tax was a cause of great tension between Conservative central Governments and Local Authorities in Scotland. Upon its introduction, Labour Councillors in Stirling joined with their colleagues from other regions in criticising the Tax and, in particular, its potential effects on their area<sup>57</sup>. Many of these protests were co-

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Lord Strathclyde, 8.11.00.

<sup>55</sup> 5.5.88, p12.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 7.5.88, p1.

<sup>57</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

ordinated through Convention of Scottish Local Authorities policy groups<sup>58</sup>. It is interesting to note that such Scotland-wide co-ordination was much harder for Conservative Local Government representatives to muster when they wanted to defend the 'POMP'<sup>59</sup>. However, despite being better organised than their Conservative counterparts, Labour Councils in Scotland were not always able to make completely unified stands against the metropolitan Government. Even though they may have agreed in principle to the stands being taken against subsidy cuts or the Poll Tax, some of the less well-funded Labour Councils were not prepared to risk being punished with even more subsidy cuts for disobeying directives from Westminster<sup>60</sup>. At the beginning of 1989, it appeared that Stirling would have the highest Poll Tax in Scotland. However, rather than lose support due to their culpability in setting such a high rate, the Labour Local Authority sought to shift blame onto the metropolitan Government<sup>61</sup>. In order to do so, the Labour group drew attention to the fact that Stirling was to receive the third lowest level of central Government subsidy for the Tax (£22 *per capita*, as opposed to the Scottish average of £55 *per capita*). Labour Councillor Jack McConnell said: "Now people on low incomes in Stirling are not only subsidising the better off... but also the rest of Scotland"<sup>62</sup>.

Nevertheless, the Labour group on Stirling Council had to manoeuvre most adroitly to make political capital from the introduction of the Poll Tax in their region. This was because, once actual bills started to arrive, it became apparent that the Tax was not going to hurt as many

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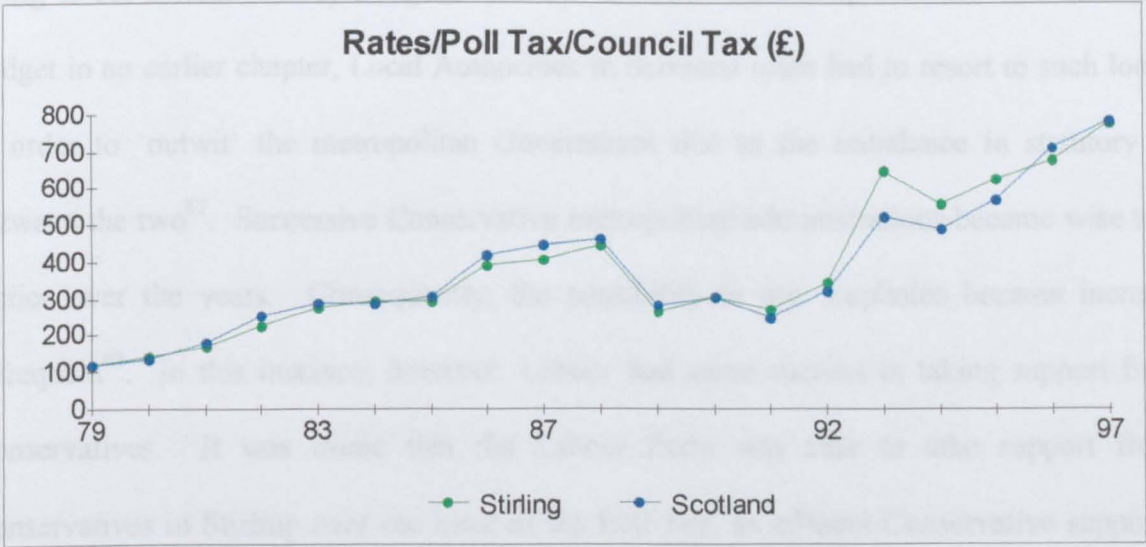
<sup>58</sup> Ibid (Lab).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid (Con & Lab). The view of the Labour Group in the survey was that the Conservative Scottish Local Government representatives were (and are) not comfortable in the forum of COSLA.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid (Lab).

<sup>61</sup> Stirling Observer, 13.1.89, p1.

voters financially as in the rest of Scotland. As we have seen, Labour Councils were not averse to setting high Poll Taxes, as they were happy to collect the revenue whilst deflecting the complaints of taxpayers onto the metropolitan Government. On average, however, households in Stirling District would be paying only £9 *per annum* more under the Poll Tax than they did under Domestic Rates<sup>63</sup>. In some wards, the difference would be as much as £238, but it should also be noted that several affluent Conservative wards were to see their bills drop by up to £304. This phenomenon is revealed in Chart 6.11, which shows the actual monthly domestic charges. This demonstrates that very high charges were never a feature in Stirling. Importantly, therefore, Conservative Councillors in the area were not voted out of office in protest to the Tax, as was the case in many other areas.



6.11 – Sources: *Regional Trends*<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Labour Party figures in *Stirling Observer*, 27.1.89, p1.

<sup>64</sup> *Regional Trends*: Number 16, 1981, p94, #22, 1987, p110, #26, 1991, p160, #30, 1995, p87, #31, 1996, p201, #33, 1998, p79.

Amongst the Conservative Councillors surveyed for this thesis, it was the consensus that the metropolitan Government policy that the Labour group on Stirling Council was most effective in discrediting amongst the electorate was the Poll Tax. Especially when they were in control of the Council, Labour members were able to use media coverage of Council affairs, meeting agenda setting and the power to put motions to the Council very proficiently in their campaign against the 'POMP'<sup>65</sup>. Perhaps the most astute tactic employed to discredit the Tax, and the Conservatives in London who generated it, was a campaign to instruct voters to pay one day after the financial year in which their money was due had finished<sup>66</sup>. Thereby, Labour Councillors could not be accused of inciting voters to break the law, but were successful in discrediting the Tax and bringing chaos to metropolitan Government departments who were trying to set annual subsidy budgets. As we saw with the example of the Clackmannanshire budget in an earlier chapter, Local Authorities in Scotland often had to resort to such loopholes in order to 'outwit' the metropolitan Government due to the imbalance in statutory power between the two<sup>67</sup>. Successive Conservative metropolitan administrations became wise to these tactics over the years. Consequently, the possibility to use loopholes became increasingly infrequent<sup>68</sup>. In this instance, however, Labour had some success in taking support from the Conservatives. It was ironic that the Labour Party was able to take support from the Conservatives in Stirling over the issue of the Poll Tax, as affluent Conservative supporters in

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<sup>65</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid (Lab).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid (Lab).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid (Lab).

this region had campaigned most vociferously and successfully for a change to the Domestic Rates system<sup>69</sup>.

The perceived inequity of the system was a clear target for the Labour group on the Council<sup>70</sup>. However, they were still not able to make enough ground in the 'POS' to oust the Conservative MP because the presence of significant numbers of Conservatives on the Council precluded complete ideological hegemony for Labour. Furthermore, the Labour group could not set extremely high levels of Poll Tax in a Council with considerable Conservative representation. Their counterparts in less contested areas could do so; thereby generating much revenue, but at little 'POS' cost to themselves, as they could blame the metropolitan Government for imposing the Tax.

Even though the actual charges did not seem to warrant it as much as elsewhere in Scotland, the Conservative group still felt justified in attacking what they perceived to be the high-spending Labour members for setting high figures<sup>71</sup>. It is interesting to note that Stirling was one of the only areas in Scotland where the Conservatives had sufficient numbers and credibility in Local Government to be able to engage in a concerted attack on Labour's handling of the Poll Tax without discrediting themselves in the eyes of the electorate<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid (Con).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid (Con & Lab).

<sup>71</sup> Stirling Observer, 27.1.89, p1.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

As in the rest of Britain, the Labour group in Stirling was able to make some political capital from the Poll Tax/Local Authority funding issue<sup>73</sup>. Importantly, however, due to the relatively low financial impact of the issue on the voters of the area compared to other Scottish regions, the Conservatives in Stirling managed to hold most of their seats on the Council on this occasion. Thus, the potential 'POS' problems caused by losing significant Local Government representation were avoided. This loyalty towards their Conservative Councillors amongst the electorate was due to personal affinities and the financial gains made by long-standing and newly affluent Conservative voters who were prospering financially under the new Tax<sup>74</sup>. The latter reason suggests that the Tax had some isolated support in Scotland. More importantly, however, the former reminds us that, although accessible 'friendly' Councillors could not always sway a voter from long-standing loyalties in a General Election, they held sufficient potential to do so in small communities to deserve more easily defensible policies from the metropolitan Conservative elite. As on the national scale, it is now important to see whether there were any significant changes noticed after Mr Major took office in 1990?

### ***Stirling in the 1990s***

We have seen that the Labour group on Stirling Council in the 1980s sought to contend much of the contemporary 'POMP.' However, the remaining Conservative Councillors managed to preserve the Party's 'POS' adequately for their MP to stay in office. In this most Conservative area of Scotland, it seems that the Labour group in the Local Authority actually managed to keep the party competition closer than the economic circumstances of the area would have suggested

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<sup>73</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid (Con).

was possible in the 1980s. It now remains to be seen how this situation changed in the 1990s to such a degree that the Conservative MP lost his seat in 1997.

In early 1992, it was announced that Stirling was to receive £100m in metropolitan Government investment. Most of this money was to be spent on the region's castle and other tourist attractions<sup>75</sup>. This is an example of the metropolitan Government becoming engaged in local affairs in order to improve its General Election chances. However, this gesture was not able to mask other concurrent problems, which Labour Local Councillors were able to blame the metropolitan Conservatives for, and thus gain support in Stirling.

For example, teachers' wages in the region went up. This could only be paid for by an increase in Poll Tax<sup>76</sup>. Rather than losing support for raising taxes, as was the metropolitan Government's hope, Labour Local Government representatives were able to turn the argument in their favour by blaming the Conservatives in London for not giving sufficient subsidy and imposing such an inequitable tax. Similarly, when Council services did have to be cut, Labour were able to deflect criticism from their apparent overspending by blaming the threat of metropolitan Government capping<sup>77</sup>. £4.7m worth of cuts had to be effected in the Central region of Scotland at this time in order to avoid Charge Capping<sup>78</sup>. Thus, it seems that there was little that Local Authorities north of the border could do to circumvent metropolitan Government directives on 'Rolling Back the State.' However, through deft use of the situation, Labour were

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<sup>75</sup> Times, 4.2.92, p15.

<sup>76</sup> Stirling News, 27.2.92, p9.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 7.5.92, p1.

<sup>78</sup> Stirling Observer, 10.1.92, p1 & 31.1.92, pp1-2.

again able to change the circumstances to their favour by being seen to be the defenders of local rights and services. It appears that in the 1990s, the ideological hegemony and credibility of the Conservatives was waning, even amongst their own supporters. This can be explained by the economic downturn, a more credible Opposition and lack of strong central Party leadership at the time. Thus, where they were able to defend controversial measures in the 'POMP' in the 1980s, they could no longer do so<sup>79</sup>.

We saw earlier in this thesis how some Conservatives in Scotland sought to disassociate themselves from the metropolitan Government when it became apparent that the central administration's image was hurting the Party's chances in Local Government Elections north of the border. In the 1995 Local Government Election in Stirling, this point was made again by the Conservative candidates<sup>80</sup>. As we have seen in earlier chapters, Conservatives in Scotland were occasionally frustrated by what they perceived to be a lack of regional sensitivity in the formulation of the 'POMP.' Whilst they agreed with the principles behind the policies emanating from London, Scottish Conservative Councillors in the 1980s and 1990s would have liked to have had the opportunity to make slight amendments to suit local conditions<sup>81</sup>. When this flexibility was not forthcoming, many Councillors felt let down by the Party elite in London. As this thesis has sought to promote, this underestimation of the importance of Party Local Government representatives in Scotland on the part of the Leadership in London was having a malevolent effect on the Conservatives' 'POS.'

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<sup>79</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con & Lab), Winter 2001-2001.

<sup>80</sup> Stirling News, 16.2.95, p2.



As local MP, Michael Forsyth sought to counter this central problem ahead of the 1995 Local Government Elections in Scotland by helping the Stirling Conservatives' campaign through attacking the Labour Councillors for school closures. However, as we saw earlier, such tactics could be effectively countered by arguments that metropolitan Government spending limits were enforcing cuts<sup>82</sup>. After the 1995 Local Government Election, where Labour regained control of the Council that they had lost by a cut of the cards after the previous tied election in 1992, the Conservatives in Stirling blamed the Party elite in London for their loss<sup>83</sup>. It is also interesting to note that Forsyth identified the 1995 Local Government Election results in Stirling as a stern warning for the metropolitan Government ahead of the 1997 General Election<sup>84</sup>. However, this warning came too late and was not promoted with enough vigour to be effective<sup>85</sup>.

In 1995, Forsyth felt that his position as MP was in jeopardy. This was because he believed that, despite a good record of service provision and tax cuts in the area, the Conservatives had suffered unsustainable losses in the Local Government Elections due to the 'POMP.' Stirling had been a 'flagship' Conservative Council in Scotland, in the manner of Wandsworth and Westminster in England<sup>86</sup>. In addition to its record on service provision and tax cuts, Forsyth noted how Stirling Council had been such a good example of the virtues of strong Local Government, rather than remote metropolitan administration. This comment was not a call for Devolution in the nationalist sense, but did seem to hark back to the more

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<sup>81</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>82</sup> Stirling News, 2.3.95, p1.

<sup>83</sup> Stirling Observer, 14.4.95, p4.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01 & Stirling Observer, 30.3.95, p3.

decentralised Unionist principles employed in the pre-Thatcher era. It also marked a slight deviation from Thatcherite notions of bypassing Local Government in favour of devolving 'power' direct to the voters<sup>87</sup>. Nonetheless, there were some references to 1980s policy in the form of considerable Thatcherite rhetoric about efficient Local Government and the minimisation of bureaucracy. In summation, however, it was clear notice that, by the mid-1990s, the 'POMP' was finally putting too much strain on Party representatives in Local Government in even the most Conservative areas of Scotland. The Conservatives in Stirling, by their association with the metropolitan Government, no longer held sufficient credibility to allow them to maintain the levels of organisation and support that were required for successful General Election campaigns.

Just before the 1997 General Election campaign, the Labour-controlled Stirling Council criticised the Scottish Office's consultative document on nursery vouchers<sup>88</sup>. The metropolitan Government wanted to launch a pilot scheme in four of the new Unitary Councils; Local Authorities in Scotland believed that this scheme would take £40m from central subsidies for Local Government. Stirling Council was able to highlight problems with the scheme. Nonetheless, its statutory obligation to defer to Acts of the Westminster Parliament meant that the scheme, like the Poll Tax, had to be implemented. Even though this is another example of a Scottish Local Authority having insufficient statutory power to actually disrupt the 'POMP' directly, they were again able to demonstrate faults with central Government policy to the electorate. At this point, however, there were fewer Conservative Councillors to counter

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01 & Bulpitt in: Madgwick and Rose (eds.), 1982, p163. This Thatcherite tactic is examined in more detail earlier in this thesis (Chapter 5, especially).

Labour's points. If the hypothesis is correct, this dynamic had a significant effect on the Conservatives' 'POS' in Scotland.

This chapter has given examples from a localised area that suggest that this work's hypothesis (that Local Government losses in Scotland made subsequent General Election campaigns difficult for the Conservatives north of the border) may be credible. We have noted how the Stirling Parliamentary seat was not lost by the Conservatives until they had suffered significant Local Government losses in the area; despite other possible causes of the defeat having been in evidence for some time before 1997. Due to economic downturns and aspects of the 'POMP' such as subsidy cuts, the Labour group in Stirling had similar opportunities as their colleagues around Scotland to discredit the Conservatives in the 1980s and 1990s. However, they were not able to do so sufficiently to oust the Conservative MP until there was a significant drop in Conservative Local Government representation.

1980s policies such as the Poll Tax had not significantly affected the numbers of Conservative Local Councillors in Stirling as much as in other parts of Scotland. This was due to the demographic and economic profile of the area. Once Conservatives on the Local Council finally were replaced, however, the Party's General Election chances did seem to be significantly diminished. The relative economic prosperity of the area just before the 1997 General Election precludes the most usual reason for ousting an incumbent MP representing the metropolitan Government. Similarly, there is no evidence of a substantial demographic shift in the area between 1992 and 1997. Many loyal and potential Conservative voters were still living

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<sup>88</sup> Times Educational Scottish Supplement, 8.11.96, p3.

prosperously in the area. That they had fewer Party Local Government representatives to marshal their support seems to have been a significant factor in Michael Forsyth's defeat.

Throughout this thesis, we have seen qualitative reasons for why the loss of Local Government representation might have been significantly damaging to the Conservatives' General Election chances in Scotland. What is still required, however, is quantitative evidence that these dynamics were actually played out in the General Elections in question. If such evidence comes to light, more significance will be lent to the argument in the hypothesis. Thus, the chances of Conservative General and Local Government Election losses in Scotland having no causal relationship, but just being associated symptoms of a more general decline, will be diminished. Therefore, it is the final task of the work to design and implement a suitable scheme for measuring the precise effect of Local Government representation losses on Conservative General Election chances throughout all regions of the UK between 1979-1997.

## ***7. General & Local Government Election Results 1979-1997***

### ***Introduction & Hypothesis***

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted one phenomenon in Scottish political culture that may have had a direct and, as yet, unacknowledged effect on the relationship between the Conservatives' 'POMP' and 'POS' north of the border. As we have seen, Scots' relationship with their Local Councillors seems to be quite close. This is mainly due to higher levels of state involvement in Scottish life, a lack of faith in, and legitimate mandate for, government from London, and closer community spirit engendered by structural and civil society factors.

On both sides of the border, economic hardship and unpopular central Government policies caused the Conservatives to lose many Local Government Council seats due to mid-term protest votes in the 1980s and 1990s. Examples of such unpopular measures in the 'POMP' included the Poll Tax and industrial closures. What has not been addressed is how this dynamic reacted back on the Party's hold on office in Westminster via local party politics. Therefore, the hypothesis being tested is whether these policies emanating from London caused, due to their effect on Local Government Elections and local party politics, particularly significant damage to the Conservatives' 'POS' in Scotland. Thusfar, this thesis has introduced and developed arguments about why the hypothesis appears to be true. We have seen how Conservative ideology, organisation and policies were not appropriate or well received in Scotland. It has also been demonstrated how Scottish Local Government representatives should have been able to

influence General Election voting quite effectively. Furthermore, the Stirling case study identifies the reduction of Conservative Local Government representation as a significant cause of the loss of the Westminster seat. It is therefore the task of this final study to measure whether indeed the proposition in the hypothesis can be supported to an acceptable degree by actual election results from all of Scotland during the era in question.

The methodology, including an explanation and justification of the points system that has been devised follows<sup>1</sup>. Thereafter, I shall present the major findings in order to substantiate the arguments put forward during my elite interview programme. Essentially, the traditional canon of literature on the Conservatives' downfall north of the border blames direct voter association between the Party elite in London and Scottish economic and fiscal problems. I wish to contend that there was another important, less direct, connection between the 'POMP' and General Election losses. Unpopular policies emanating from Westminster were causing many Conservative Local Government representatives to lose office on both sides of the border. If the hypothesis is correct, it was in Scotland that this dynamic had particularly damaging General Election consequences for the Party, as they found it harder to organise the 'POS' in General Elections without a significant core of Local Government representatives *in situ*. If this was actually the case, then I believe that a new and significant perspective on the relationship between the 'POMP' and the 'POS' in Scotland will have been revealed.

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<sup>1</sup> Technical details and data sets are presented in appendices to this chapter, as detailed in the text.

## ***Psephological Study***

Before the methodology, data and results of this study are presented, an explanation of the origins and sources for this work must be given. I wish to quantify how successful Conservative General Election campaigns have been in specified regions of the United Kingdom. The existing canon of literature on British General Election statistics concentrates on percentage swings or seats won and lost<sup>2</sup>. As will be explained in greater detail later, such methodologies do not serve to test my hypothesis. Therefore, I have had to combine familiar statistical techniques in an original methodology that serves the purposes of this thesis better. There are few footnotes, as this method has not been copied from previous studies. Nonetheless, it conforms to the basic principles of quantitative work, with especial reference to the work of Ottar Hellevik on causal analysis through bivariate cross-tabulation<sup>3</sup> and the methods of Michigan Scaling of interval level data.

The first stage of this empirical study was to identify which English, Scottish and Welsh Local Councils (County, District and Unitary Authority) had seen significant (5%+) reductions in Conservative representation in the interim periods between the General Elections of 1979, 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997. This exercise was undertaken to establish a limited dependant variable, which could be used for comparing the various geographical regions across the period

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<sup>2</sup> For example: "Dod's Parliamentary Companion"; the Butler & Kavanagh "British General Election of..." series; Evans, Geoffrey & Norris, Pippa (eds.): "Critical Elections. British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective", London, Sage, 1999; Heath, Anthony; Jowell, Roger & Curtice, John: "How Britain Votes", Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1985; King, Anthony (ed.): "Britain at the Polls", Chatham, Chatham House, 1992 and Norris, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Hellevik, Ottar: "Introduction to Causal Analysis – Exploring Survey Data by Crosstabulation", London, Allen & Unwin, 1984, Chapter 1, especially. I am also very grateful to Dr Edvard Johansson, Swedish School of Economics, for his help with this study.

in question. Being able to compare Scotland with other regions that suffered similar losses in Conservative Local Government representation will lend more precision to the case in favour of the hypothesis.

The values in Chart 7.1 record the average proportion (%) of Councils per region where the Conservatives lost 5% or more of their representatives between 1979-1997 (all sources of data are listed at the end of this chapter):

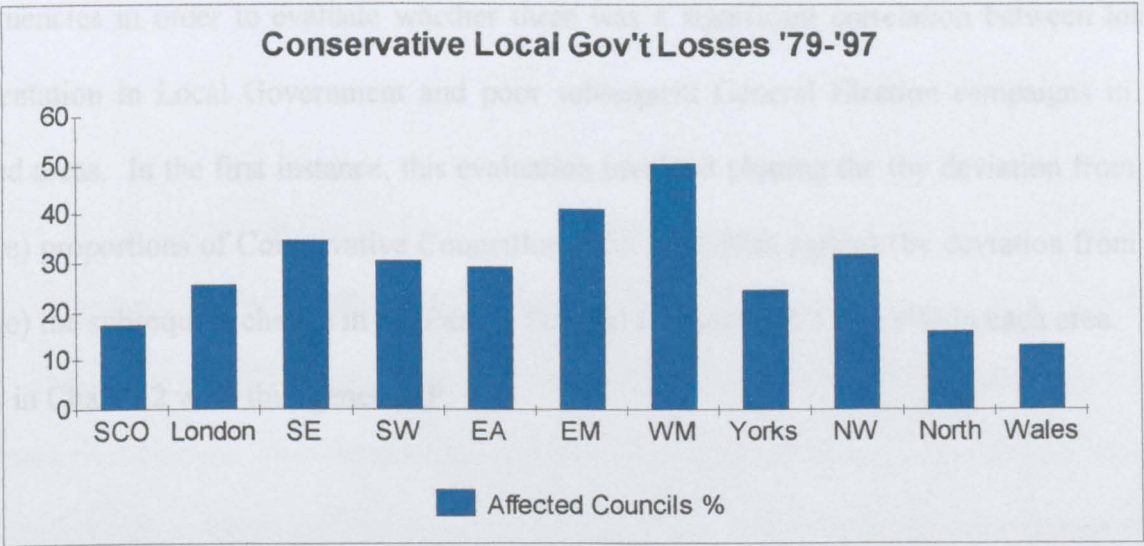


Chart 7.1

Now that we can see that Conservative Local Government losses in Scotland were no worse than anywhere else in Britain, it seems legitimate to proceed with an assessment of subsequent General Election results. If these General Election results are indeed worse in Scotland than in other regions previously affected by Local Government losses, the hypothesis (that significant Local Government losses in Scotland were capable of jeopardising subsequent



General Election chances there) will be supported. Many of these Councils had at least parts of more than one General Election constituency within their boundaries. Therefore, the next task was to identify how many Westminster seats were affected by these Conservative Local Government representation losses. The data set in Appendix A to this chapter was thus generated.

***Analysis of Voting Swings***

The next stage was to examine the Conservatives’ General Election results in these constituencies in order to evaluate whether there was a significant correlation between losing representation in Local Government and poor subsequent General Election campaigns in the affected areas. In the first instance, this evaluation involved plotting the (by deviation from the average) proportions of Conservative Councillors who lost office against (by deviation from the average) the subsequent change in the Party’s General Election (GE) vote (%) in each area. The results in Chart 7.2 were thus generated<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> The data for Charts 7.2 & 7.3 may be found in Appendix B to this chapter.

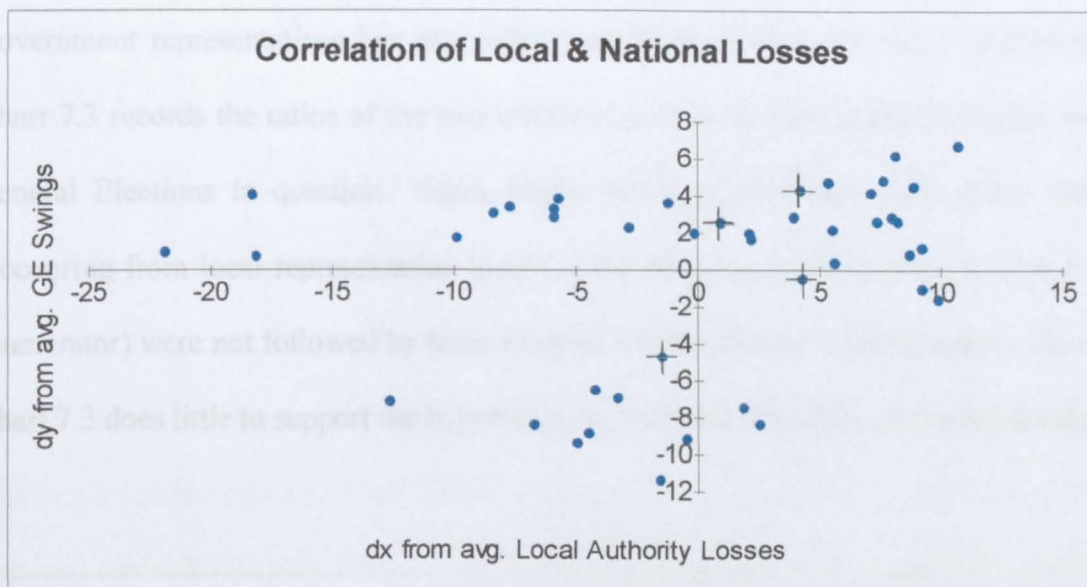


Chart 7.2

As can be seen from this nominal data, the almost equal distribution of points between quadrants one, two and four suggests that, using this methodology, there seems to have been only a weak correlation ( $r = 0.23$ ) between losing Conservative Local Government representation and subsequent poor General Election results. Therefore, it would not be legitimate just to identify the Scottish results in Chart 7.2<sup>5</sup> and conclude that Local Government representation losses there were the cause of worse General Election results than in other regions. This data refers to the UK as a whole over the four General Elections in question. By virtue of Chart 1.2, that the inclusion of the English results in Chart 7.2 would render the correlation weak was predictable.

<sup>5</sup> At points: (0.881, 2.6) (4.29, -0.389) (4.201, 4.308) & (-1.47, -4.623) in Chart 7.2 – marked with a ‘+.’

Context In another attempt to support the hypothesis using purely the numbers of Local Government representatives lost and subsequent General Election voting percentage changes, Chart 7.3 records the ratios of the two variables in each of the regions, averaged over the four General Elections in question. Here, higher ratios could equate with better proficiency at recovering from local representation losses at the next General Election, as severe local losses (numerator) were not followed by large General Election losses (denominator). As can be seen, Chart 7.3 does little to support the hypothesis, as Scotland falls close to the mean value.

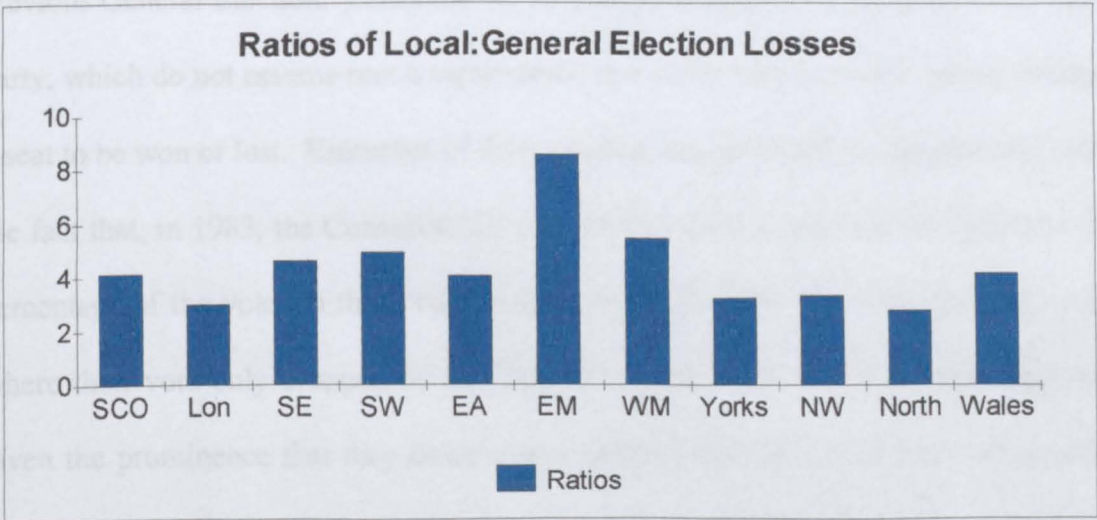


Chart 7.3

**Weighted Average Scoring System**

Whilst the nominal information above proved interesting with regard to disputing the hypothesis, closer inspection of the General Election results, where Scotland was a consistently weak area for the Conservatives, suggests that the processes used above provide an insufficient analysis of the situation in hand. The key question is how best to evaluate the effectiveness of a

Conservative General Election campaign in an area that has recently suffered losses in Party Local Government representation? Due to the plurality voting system employed in General Elections, merely measuring the Party's change in vote in a constituency from one election to the next can often be misleading. The essence of a successful General Election campaign in a plurality system is whether or not the seat was won.

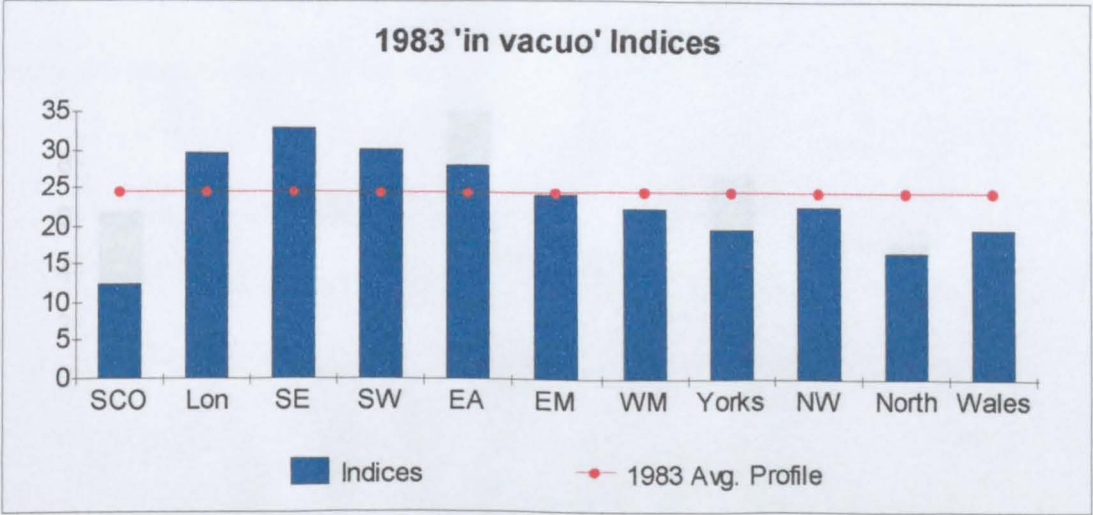
Because of the multi-party system, it is possible to increase one's share of the vote and still lose incumbency; or still win a seat despite polling a lower proportion of the vote than in the previous General Election. Furthermore, very small swings in the proportions of votes cast for a party, which do not assume much significance in a study based only on voting swings, can cause a seat to be won or lost. Examples of these phenomena generated by the plurality system include the fact that, in 1983, the Conservatives won eleven seats in my data set despite polling a lower percentage of the votes in those constituencies than in 1979. In 1992, the Party lost four seats where their vote only dropped by less than 1% since 1987. Such minor swings would not be given the prominence that they deserve in a method that only considered proportions of votes. Conversely, in 1997, the Conservatives managed to hold 248 seats in my data set where their vote had dropped by more than 10% since 1992. Again, a proportion-based methodology would not be appropriate here, as it would assume that these results were disastrous for the Party. That they held on to the seats in question suggests that, as my preferred methodology does, some reward is appropriate. Therefore, for the purposes of testing my hypothesis, it was necessary to devise a method of assessing Conservative General Election performance that placed more importance on the success of winning a seat, or failure of losing one, than could be derived from simply looking at changes in percentages of votes received.

My preferred method for achieving this was to devise a points or scoring system that rewarded or penalised the Party in any given region for winning or losing a seat, with less importance being placed on merely whether its proportion of the vote had risen or fallen<sup>6</sup>. The methodology and data sets for this exercise are set out in Appendix C to this chapter. The points scheme in use assesses how far each of the British regions deviated (better or worse) from weighted average regional profiles. Thus, the results in Charts 7.4 to 7.7 were generated. These figures represent how comparatively well the Conservatives performed in each of the various regions in constituencies that had experienced a 5%+ loss in Party representation in Local Government since the last General Election. The '*in vacuo*' in the titles of this first set of charts refers to the way in which these indices were generated, as described in the methodology. That is to say, that each of the Charts 7.4 to 7.7 only takes into account the results of the particular General Election to which it refers. This method accounts for any short-term or local issues that might have affected the results. Based on this data, no comparisons can be made from year to year. That exercise is undertaken next.

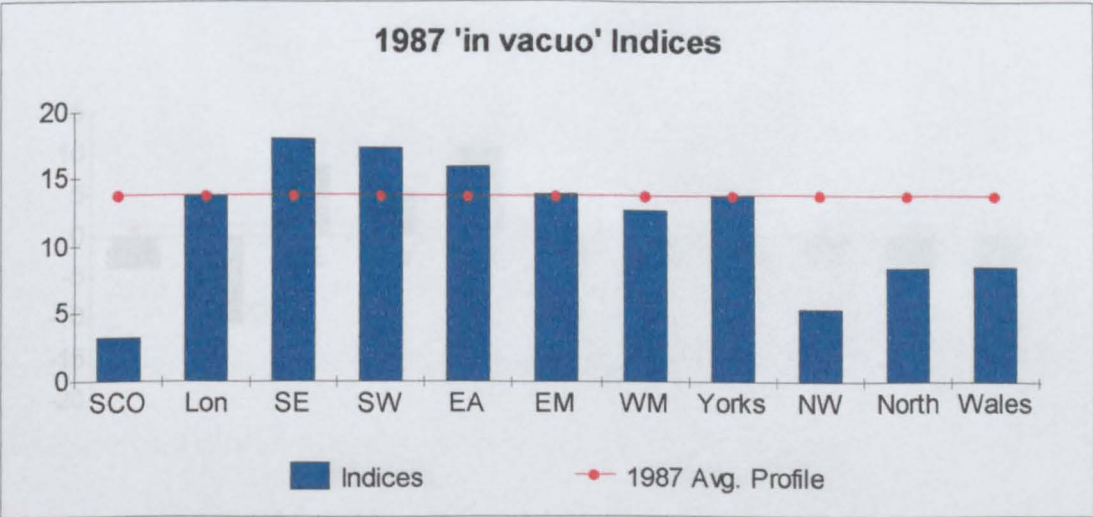
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<sup>6</sup> Some regard is paid to campaigns where the seat was neither won nor lost but the Conservatives' share of the vote rose or fell by a significant (5%+) margin. This aspect of the methodology has been included to take into account the fact that there are some regions where a Conservative candidate may have no chance of winning a seat; therefore, only a significant change in the votes that they were able to poll demonstrates the effectiveness of their campaign.





*Chart 7.4*



*Chart 7.5*

The results in Chart 7.5 (1987) suggest that regions like the Yorkshire and the East of England found it harder to recover in General Election 1992, and regions like the South East and the South West.

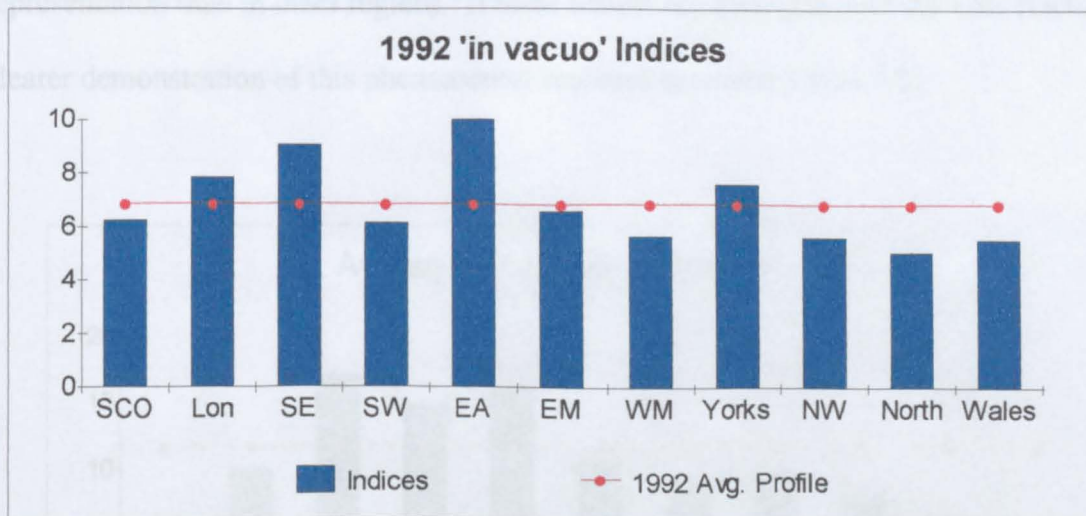


Chart 7.6

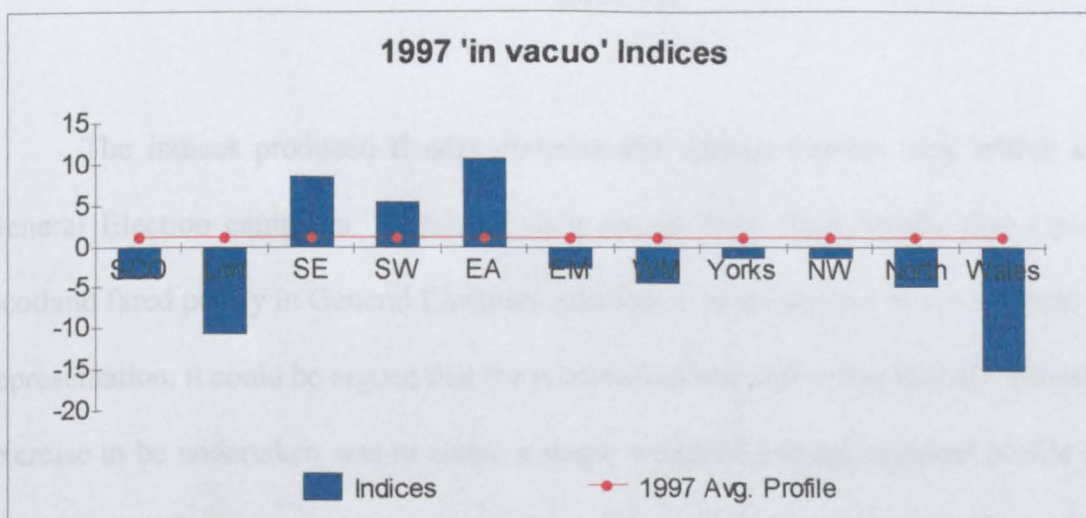


Chart 7.7

The results in Charts 7.4 to 7.7 support the hypothesis that the Conservatives did find it harder to recover in General Elections in Scotland after significant losses in Local Government

representation than in other regions. If these results are averaged over the four elections, an even clearer demonstration of this phenomenon becomes apparent (Chart 7.8).

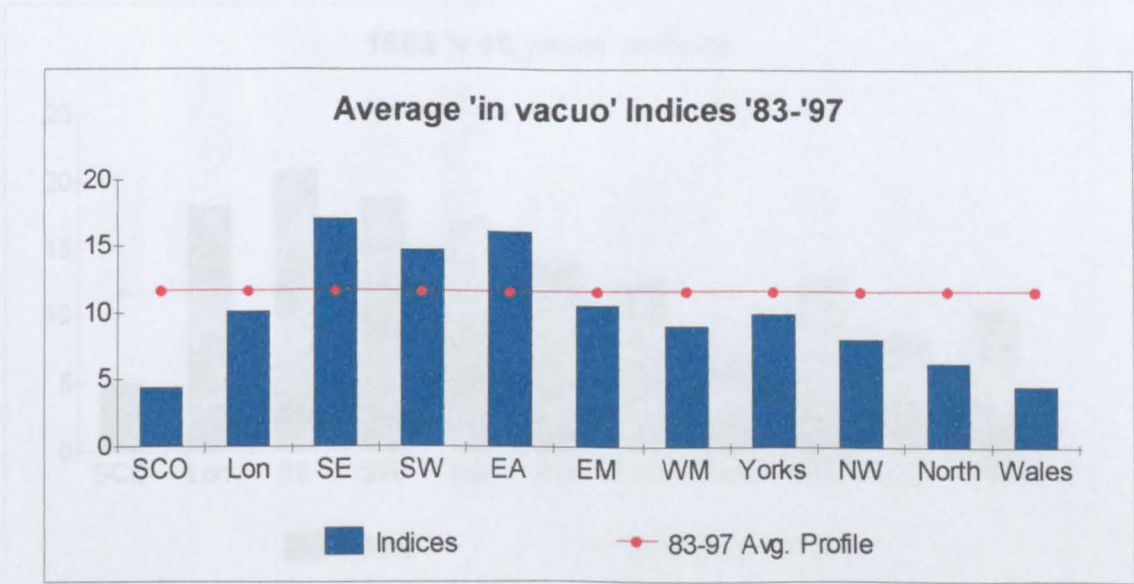


Chart 7.8

The indices produced thusfar compare the various regions only within each specific General Election campaign. Whilst it does appear from these results that Conservatives in Scotland fared poorly in General Elections subsequent to substantial losses in Local Government representation, it could be argued that the relationship was still co-incidental. Therefore, the next exercise to be undertaken was to create a single weighted average regional profile for all of the four General Elections under consideration. Cross-tabulation of this profile with the regional results provides indices that demonstrate the comparative merits of the campaigns in each region with regard to the norm for the whole era in question (hence 'v all years'). This more rigorous test negates the effect of local issues that might have swung General Election results away from



the regional norm for one election only. Based on this method, the results in Charts 7.9 to 7.12 were generated.

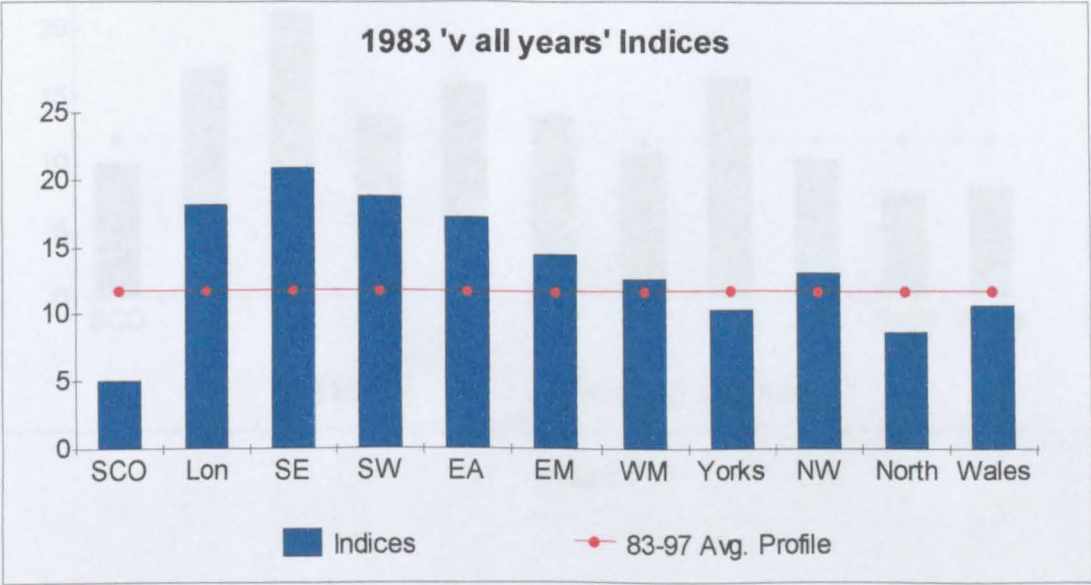


Chart 7.9

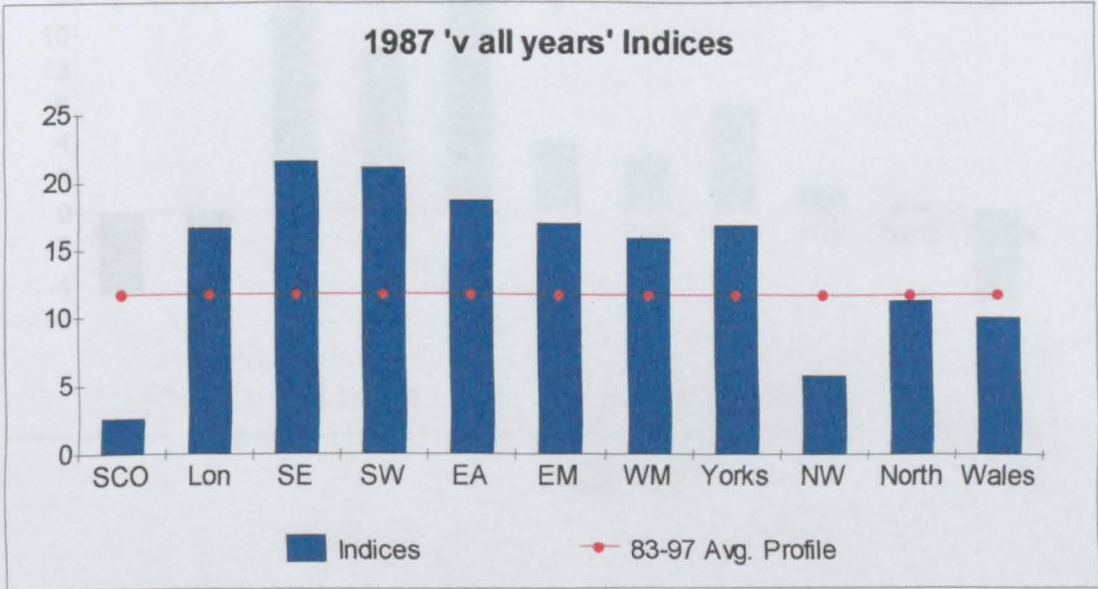


Chart 7.10

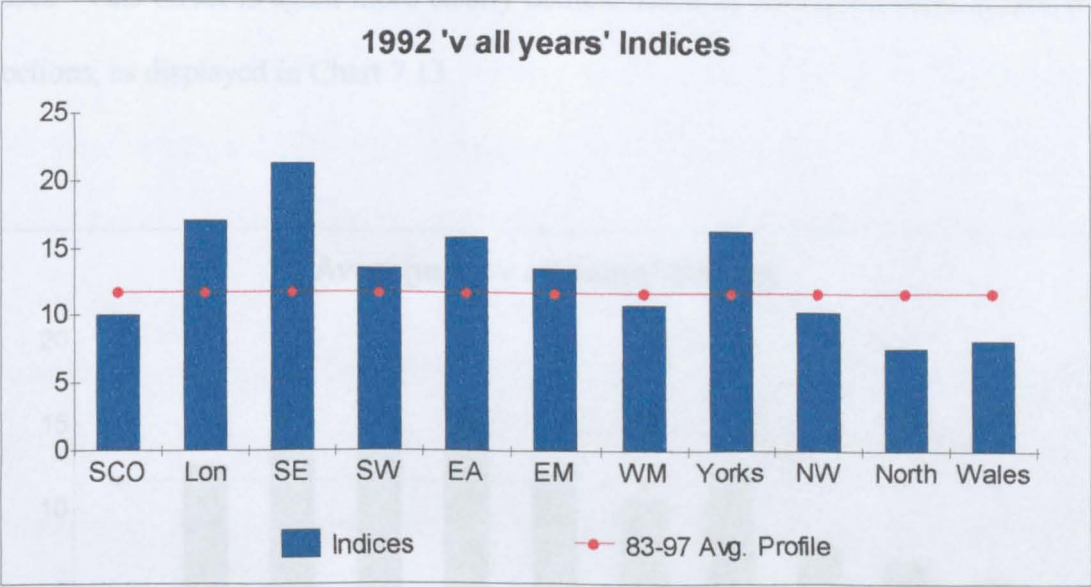


Chart 7.11

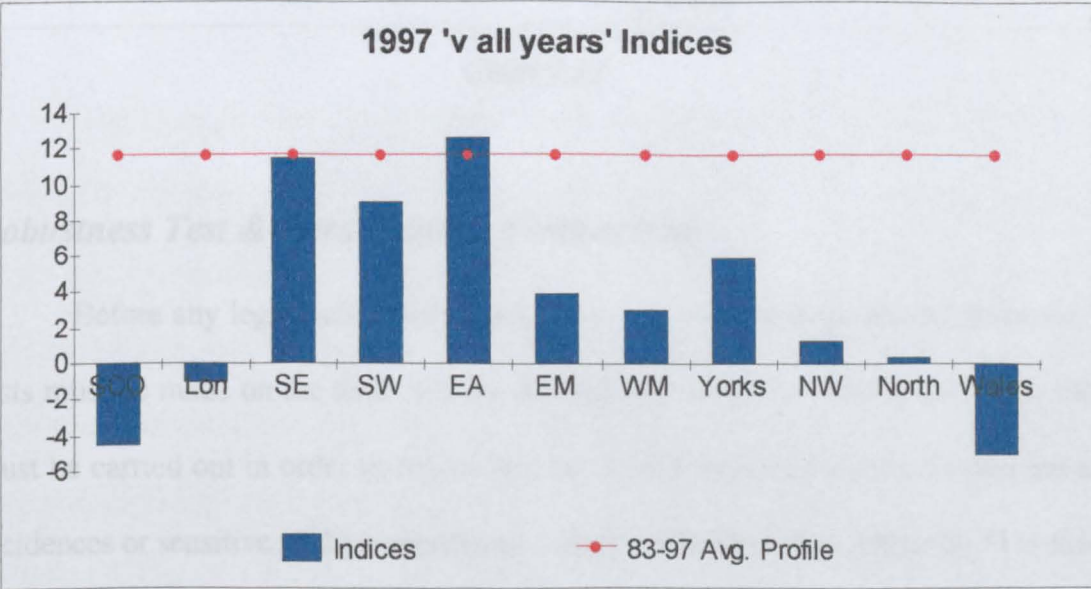


Chart 7.12

These results lend further credence to the hypothesis by demonstrating that Scotland was still consistently a very weak region for the Conservatives after Local Government representation

losses. This effect is again more clearly demonstrated by averaging these results over the four elections, as displayed in Chart 7.13.

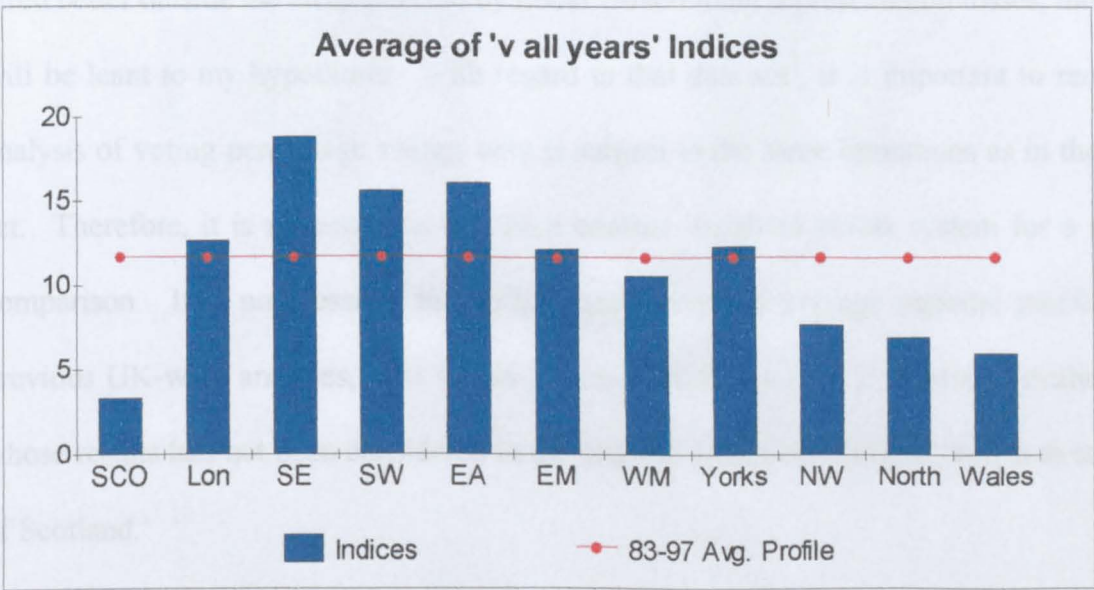


Chart 7.13

**Robustness Test & Intra-Scottish Comparison**

Before any legitimate conclusions can be taken from these results, however, two further tests must be made on the data. Firstly, as with any weighted scoring system, a robustness test must be carried out in order to ensure that the results that have been collected are not mere co-incidences or sensitive to the methodology. Such a test appears in Appendix D to this chapter. It confirms the robustness of the scoring system in use.

Secondly, we must investigate the possibility that the Conservatives in Scotland fared just as badly in General Elections in constituencies not affected by previous significant losses in

Local Government representation. If this was the case, then the variable in question could not be accepted as significantly causal. To do this, another data set must be created; one that records how these unaffected Scottish constituencies voted in General Elections. If the Conservatives fared better outside the areas affected by Local Government representation losses, more credence will be lent to my hypothesis. With regard to that data set<sup>7</sup>, it is important to remember that analysis of voting percentage swings only is subject to the same limitations as in the wider data set. Therefore, it is necessary to construct another weighted points system for a more useful comparison. It is not possible to use the same weighted average regional profiles as in the previous UK-wide analyses, as it would not be legitimate to use a system to evaluate a region whose results had not been considered in the original weighted averages; that is to say, the ‘Rest of Scotland.’

Therefore, it was necessary to construct new weighted averages for Scotland alone<sup>8</sup>. Thereafter, the same index-generating calculations (*‘in vacuo’* and *‘v all years’*) were undertaken as for the UK-wide data set. Taking the four General Elections into consideration, the average indices of the two Scottish sets are presented in Chart 7.14 and clearly show that the Conservatives fared worse in General Elections in Scottish constituencies that had been affected by previous significant losses in Local Government representation.

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<sup>7</sup> As presented in Appendix E to this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> The data for this process is also presented in Appendix E to this chapter.



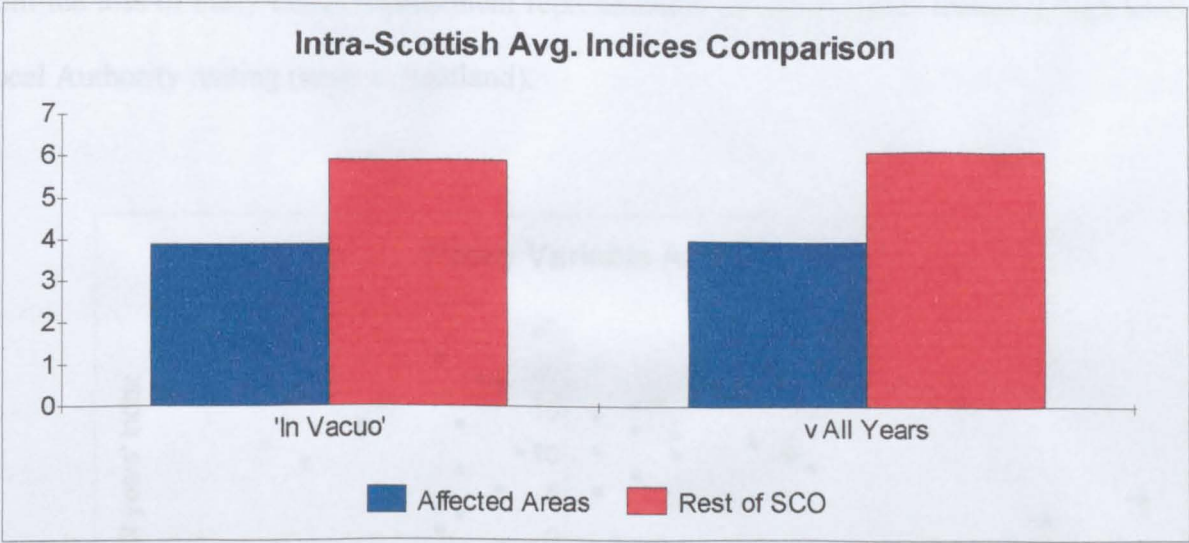


Chart 7.14

**Proxy Variable**

Finally, with regard to the party political dynamics under examination, it is useful to set up a proxy for the independent variable in the hypothesis in order to confirm the legitimacy of the results. The hypothesis under consideration proposes that the Conservative Party in Scotland fared poorly in General Elections subsequent to significant losses in Local Government representation. In the more qualitative sections of this thesis, one of the main reasons given for the likely existence of such a causal relationship in Scotland was the higher level of contact between voters and their Local Government representatives there. We have also seen how one of the clearest ways in which this relationship was manifested was through Local Authority housing provision. Therefore, if the indices produced in this study are accurate, there should be an inverse correlation between levels of Local Authority renting and index score in each of the regions. This is because Conservative General Election performance should have suffered more

from the loss of Party Local Government representation in communities featuring high levels of Local Authority renting (such as Scotland).

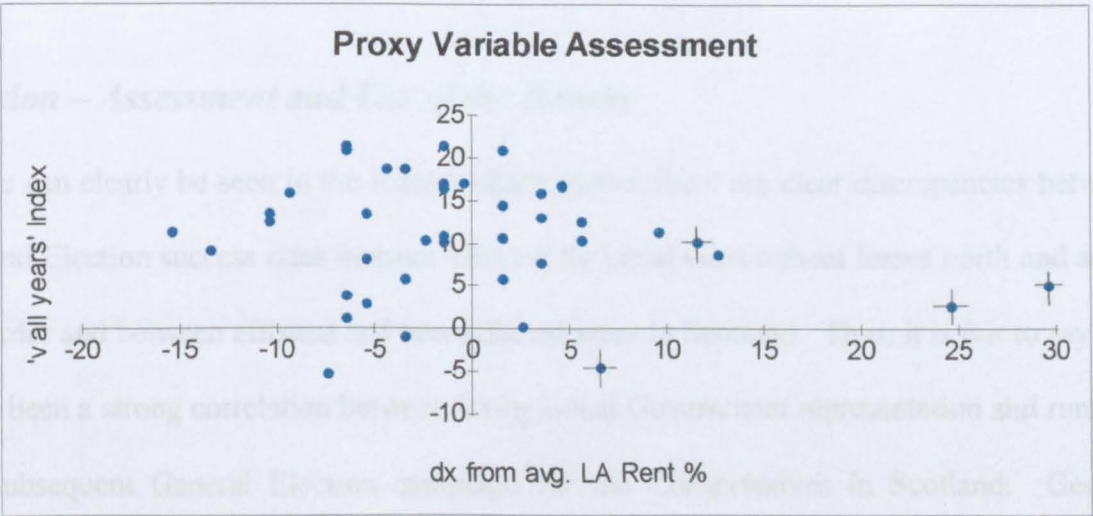


Chart 7.15

As can be seen in Chart 7.15<sup>9</sup>, which plots the regions' 'v all years' indices against their rates of Local Authority renting, the more an area deviated above the national average for Council House renting, the lower their index was likely to be<sup>10</sup>. This was always the case in Scotland<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, regions such as the South East of England, which featured well below average levels of Local Authority renting, perennially scored well in the weighted average points system. This inverse correlation does not imply definite causation, as factors in addition to low levels of dependency on Local Councils for housing may have helped the Conservative electoral cause in their English heartland areas. However, that the regions that scored poorly in the

<sup>9</sup> The data for which is presented in Appendix F to this chapter.  
<sup>10</sup> The slope of the linear regression line through the given data points is -13.608.  
<sup>11</sup> At points: (29.581, 5.097) (24.581, 2.643) (11.581, 10.122) & (6.581, -4.515) in Chart 7.15 – marked with a '+.'

weighted average scoring system were frequently where renting from the Local Council was at above average levels clearly suggests that there was an important link between loss of Conservative influence in Local Government and subsequent poor General Election results.

### ***Conclusion – Assessment and Use of the Results***

As can clearly be seen in the indices charts above, there are clear discrepancies between the General Election success rates in areas affected by Local Government losses north and south of the border and between affected and non-affected areas in Scotland. Thus, it is fair to say that there has been a strong correlation between losing Local Government representation and running a poor subsequent General Election campaign for the Conservatives in Scotland. General Election success for the Conservatives waned steadily in the 1980s and 1990s in all parts of Scotland. This study proves that the effect was much worse in areas affected by significant losses in Party Local Government representation. As was mentioned earlier, some senior Conservatives were aware of this dynamic; but were nonetheless unwilling or unable to change the course of territorial management strategy being dictated by the Party Leader at the time.

Earlier in this thesis, reasons for the increased importance of local politics in Scotland were put forward. What remains to be done in order to conclude this work, therefore, is to reassess Gamble's notion of the 'POS', determine what modifications are needed to account for contemporary Scottish conditions and, consequently, conclude whether the results of the psephological study can be legitimately added to the causes of the Conservatives' downfall north of the border.

*Data for Calculations From:*

Hemming Information Services: Municipal Yearbook & Public Services Directory –  
Authorities & Councillors

1975: pp1051-1054 &1384-1386

1978: pp605, 696, 758-763, 1260 & 1275

1982: pp666, 774, 842-847, 1408 & 1428

1984: pp725, 834, 910-915, 1477& 1496

1986: pp671, 764, 828, 898-902, 1361, 1379, 1433 &1451

1988: pp781, 865, 930, 1002-1006, 1468, 1487, 1541 & 1559

1991: pp6, 88, 149, 224-228, 697, 715, 771 &790

1993: pp6, 89, 149, 224-228, 694, 713, 767 & 785

1998: pp6, 72, 124, 188-191, 464, 658, & 701

“Dod’s Parliamentary Companion – New Parliament Edition”

1984: pp515-548

1988: pp568-602

1993: pp684-719

1998: pp786-829.

HMSO: Regional Trends

Number 20, 1985, p61, #24, 1989, p71, #29, 1994, p87 & #34, 1999, p86.



## *Appendix A*

### *Westminster Constituencies Affected by Significant Conservative Losses in Local Government Representation*

	<i>Number of Affected Westminster Constituencies</i>	<i>Number of Affected Westminster Constituencies</i>	<i>Number of Affected Westminster Constituencies</i>	<i>Number of Affected Westminster Constituencies</i>
<b>REGION</b>	<b>1979 to 1983</b>	<b>1983 to 1987</b>	<b>1987 to 1992</b>	<b>1992 to 1997</b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	27	33	27	17
<b>London</b>	15	4	15	49
<b>SE England</b>	136	113	37	243
<b>SW England</b>	52	41	14	74
<b>East Anglia</b>	15	8	9	29
<b>E. Midlands</b>	59	4	7	100
<b>W. Midlands</b>	68	24	17	49
<b>York/Humber</b>	98	18	15	10
<b>NW England</b>	109	24	19	54
<b>North (Eng.)</b>	24	3	6	26
<b>Wales</b>	32	5	16	11

*Table 7.16*

## ***Appendix B***

### ***Conservative Losses in Local Government & Subsequent Changes in General Election Support 1979-1997***

Tables 7.17 to 7.20 record, by regional average, firstly how much Local Government representation was lost by the Conservatives from one General Election to the next; and then, how their General Election vote was affected. The Councils under consideration are only where Conservative losses were 5% or more of the Council size (n = 1757).

<i><b>Region</b></i>	<i><b>Losses of Conservative Councillors from 1979-1983 (% of Council Sizes)</b></i>	<i><b>Change in General Election Support in 1983 from 1979 (%)</b></i>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	-15.019	-1.23
<b>London</b>	-13.808	-1.847
<b>SE England</b>	-23.65	-0.359
<b>SW England</b>	-21.795	-0.508
<b>East Anglia</b>	-21.619	0.08
<b>E. Midlands</b>	-34.215	0.289
<b>W. Midlands</b>	-37.821	-2.847
<b>York/Humber</b>	-24.357	-0.665
<b>NW England</b>	-34.081	-3.1
<b>North (England)</b>	-21.854	-0.946
<b>Wales</b>	-13.723	-2.2

*Table 7.17*

<b><i>Region</i></b>	<b><i>Losses of Conservative Councillors from 1983-1987 (% of Council Size)</i></b>	<b><i>Change in General Election Support in 1987 from 1983 (%)</i></b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	-11.61	-4.219
<b>London</b>	-5.221	3.0
<b>SE England</b>	-10.605	-0.973
<b>SW England</b>	-18.699	-1.455
<b>East Anglia</b>	-8.333	1.1
<b>E. Midlands</b>	-7.792	2.425
<b>W. Midlands</b>	-7.102	0.758
<b>York/Humber</b>	-7.225	-2.894
<b>NW England</b>	-6.752	-4.829
<b>North (England)</b>	-6.061	-5.4
<b>Wales</b>	-25.806	-2.06

*Table 7.18*

<i><b>Region</b></i>	<i><b>Losses of Conservative Councillors from 1987-1992 (% of Council Size)</b></i>	<i><b>Change in General Election Support in 1992 from 1987 (%)</b></i>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	-11.699	0.478
<b>London</b>	-10.602	-1.813
<b>SE England</b>	-10.397	-1.553
<b>SW England</b>	-10.29	-3.354
<b>East Anglia</b>	-6.713	-2.622
<b>E. Midlands</b>	-17.19	-0.2
<b>W. Midlands</b>	-8.583	-1.188
<b>York/Humber</b>	-7.952	-0.98
<b>NW England</b>	-11.986	-0.926
<b>North (England)</b>	-8.798	0.383
<b>Wales</b>	-7.743	-1.163

*Table 7.19*

<b><i>Region</i></b>	<b><i>Losses of Conservative Councillors from 1992-1997 (% of Council Size)</i></b>	<b><i>Change in General Election Support in 1997 from 1992 (%)</i></b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	-17.37	-8.453
<b>London</b>	-17.516	-15.127
<b>SE England</b>	-20.889	-13.145
<b>SW England</b>	-28.547	-10.886
<b>East Anglia</b>	-20.371	-12.593
<b>E. Midlands</b>	-22.633	-12.121
<b>W. Midlands</b>	-20.119	-10.229
<b>York/Humber</b>	-16.365	-12.93
<b>NW England</b>	-14.041	-11.233
<b>North (England)</b>	-13.375	-12.196
<b>Wales</b>	-19.271	-10.727

*Table 7.20*

## Appendix C

### *Methodology & Data Sets for Points System in Psephological Study*

Whether or not the Conservative candidate won, lost or held the incumbency or whether it was unchanged in the constituencies in question is recorded hereunder. The following charts show the frequency of each incident for each General Election in each of the regions.

U = incumbency unchanged and the Conservative vote changed up or down by less than 5%

U+ = incumbency unchanged, but the Conservative vote rose by 5% or more since the last General Election

U- = incumbency unchanged, but the Conservative vote fell by 5% or more since the last General Election

'N' refers to the numbers of Westminster constituencies affected by substantial (5%+) losses in Conservative Local Government representation in the interim period since the last General Election

1983	N	Wins	Holds	U	U+	Losses	U-
SCOTLAND	27	0	4	15	0	1	7
London	15	0	12	2	0	0	1
SE England	136	6	127	3	0	0	0
SW England	52	3	44	2	0	3	0
East Anglia	15	2	11	2	0	0	0
E. Midlands	62	12	37	12	0	0	1
W. Midlands	68	2	34	24	0	0	8
York/Humber	98	10	32	53	0	0	3
NW England	109	3	61	27	0	2	16
North (England)	24	1	7	11	2	0	3
Wales	32	1	13	13	0	0	5

Table 7.21

1987	N	Wins	Holds	U	U+	Losses	U-
SCOTLAND	33	0	5	11	0	6	11
London	4	0	3	0	1	0	0
SE England	113	1	110	0	0	2	0
SW England	41	0	38	3	0	0	0
East Anglia	8	0	7	0	0	1	0
E. Midlands	4	1	3	0	0	0	0
W. Midlands	24	1	15	8	0	0	0
York/Humber	18	1	13	3	0	0	1
NW England	24	0	6	9	0	2	7
North (England)	3	0	1	2	0	0	0
Wales	5	0	2	2	0	1	0

Table 7.22

1992	N	Wins	Holds	U	U+	Losses	U-
SCOTLAND	27	0	7	20	0	0	0
London	15	0	11	3	0	1	0
SE England	36	0	35	0	0	1	0
SW England	13	0	9	0	0	3	1
East Anglia	9	0	7	0	0	2	0
E. Midlands	7	0	4	2	0	1	0
W. Midlands	17	0	8	5	0	3	1
York/Humber	15	0	10	4	1	0	0
NW England	19	0	8	7	0	3	1
North (England)	6	0	1	4	1	0	0
Wales	16	0	3	12	0	1	0

Table 7.23



1997	N	Wins	Holds	U	U+	Losses	U-
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	17	0	0	1	0	5	11
<b>London</b>	49	0	8	0	0	26	15
<b>SE England</b>	243	0	150	0	0	84	9
<b>SW England</b>	74	0	39	0	0	21	14
<b>East Anglia</b>	29	0	19	0	0	7	3
<b>E. Midlands</b>	100	0	34	0	0	36	30
<b>W. Midlands</b>	49	0	15	0	0	21	13
<b>York/Humber</b>	10	0	4	0	0	5	1
<b>NW England</b>	54	0	13	0	0	20	21
<b>North (England)</b>	26	0	5	0	0	0	21
<b>Wales</b>	11	0	0	0	0	3	8

*Table 7.24*

Once the General Election results had been tabulated in this way, the next task was to devise a scoring system to generate comparable evaluations of each region. It was decided that a legitimate method for this exercise was first to calculate the profile of a weighted average region in each of the General Elections under examination. Thereafter, the actual results from each of the regions in each of the elections would be multiplied by the factors generated in the averaging process, and then divided by the size of the appropriate regional sample to show how they deviated from the norm and, most importantly, how they compared with each other.



Hereby, weighted average regional profiles were generated for each of the General Elections under examination. Starting with 1983:

1983	n	Wins	Holds	U	U+	Losses	U-
Average	58	3.636	34.727	14.909	0.182	0.545	4.000

Table 7.25

The actual results in each region are then cross-tabulated with this average profile in the following manner in order to generate comparable indices:

$$\begin{aligned} & (Number\ of\ Wins\ in\ 1983\ Average\ \times\ Number\ of\ Wins\ in\ Regional\ Profile) \\ & \qquad \qquad \qquad + \\ & (Number\ of\ Holds\ in\ 1983\ Average\ \times\ Number\ of\ Holds\ in\ Regional\ Profile) \\ & \qquad \qquad \qquad + \\ & (Number\ of\ 'U'\ in\ 1983\ Average\ \times\ Number\ of\ 'U'\ in\ Regional\ Profile) \\ & \qquad \qquad \qquad + \\ & (Number\ of\ 'U+\ '\ in\ 1983\ Average\ \times\ Number\ of\ 'U+\ '\ in\ Regional\ Profile) \\ & \qquad \qquad \qquad - \\ & (Number\ of\ Losses\ in\ 1983\ Average\ \times\ Number\ of\ Losses\ in\ Regional\ Profile) \\ & \qquad \qquad \qquad - \\ & (Number\ of\ 'U-\ '\ in\ 1983\ Average\ \times\ Number\ of\ 'U-\ '\ in\ Regional\ Profile) \end{aligned}$$

*The result is then divided by the number of seats in the regional profile to generate an index score for that area.*

Thus, with regard to constituencies in the 1983 General Election that had seen 5%+ reductions in Conservative Local Government representation since 1979, the following indices are generated for each region (these are the ‘*in vacuo*’ indices in the text/charts above).

<b>1983 REGION</b>	<b>INDEX SCORE</b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	12.37
<b>London</b>	29.503
<b>SE England</b>	32.918
<b>SW England</b>	30.136
<b>East Anglia</b>	27.939
<b>E. Midlands</b>	24.249
<b>W. Midlands</b>	22.262
<b>York/Humber</b>	19.651
<b>NW England</b>	22.631
<b>North (England)</b>	16.629
<b>Wales</b>	19.653

*Table 7.26*

The process was then repeated for the other three General Elections under consideration<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that, at this stage, these indices should only be compared with other scores in the same election as they are generated by averages specific to the year in question. This methodology thus accommodates short-term contemporary issues that affected the poll of the year in question. Longer-term trends are dealt with elsewhere in this chapter.

<b>1987</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Wins</b>	<b>Holds</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>U+</b>	<b>Losses</b>	<b>U-</b>
<b>Average</b>	25.182	0.364	18.455	3.455	0.091	1.091	1.727

Table 7.27

<b>1987 REGION</b>	<b>INDEX SCORE</b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	3.174
<b>London</b>	13.864
<b>SE England</b>	17.949
<b>SW England</b>	17.357
<b>East Anglia</b>	16.011
<b>E. Midlands</b>	13.932
<b>W. Midlands</b>	12.701
<b>York/Humber</b>	13.828
<b>NW England</b>	5.314
<b>North (England)</b>	8.455
<b>Wales</b>	8.545

Table 7.28

<b>1992</b>	n	Wins	Holds	U	U+	Losses	U-
<b>Average</b>	16.364	0	9.364	5.182	0.182	1.364	0.273

Table 7.29

1992 REGION	INDEX SCORE
SCOTLAND	6.266
London	7.812
SE England	9.073
SW England	6.147
East Anglia	6.98
E. Midlands	6.636
W. Midlands	5.674
York/Humber	7.636
NW England	5.622
North (England)	5.045
Wales	5.557

Table 7.30



1997	n	Wins	Holds	U	U+	Losses	U-
Average	60.182	0	26.091	0.091	0	20.727	13.273

Table 7.31

1997 REGION	INDEX SCORE
SCOTLAND	-3.995
London	-10.801
SE England	8.449
SW England	5.357
East Anglia	10.718
E. Midlands	-2.573
W. Midlands	-4.417
York/Humber	-1.255
NW England	-1.255
North (England)	-4.906
Wales	-15.306

Table 7.32

‘v all years’ Comparisons

In order to facilitate comparisons across all of the General Elections under consideration, the weighted average regional profile from 1983-1997 is:

1983-1997	n	Wins	Holds	U	U+	Losses	U-
Average	39.932	1	22.159	5.909	0.114	5.932	4.818

Table 7.33

When cross-tabulated with the actual results in the eleven regions according to the formula specified above, the following indices are produced:

1983 REGION	INDEX SCORE
SCOTLAND	5.097
London	18.194
SE England	20.867
SW England	18.693
East Anglia	17.171
E. Midlands	14.484
W. Midlands	12.628
York/Humber	10.386
NW England	13.076
North (England)	8.62
Wales	10.681

Table 7.34

1987 REGION	INDEX SCORE
SCOTLAND	2.643
London	16.648
SE England	21.475
SW England	20.97
East Anglia	18.648
E. Midlands	16.869
W. Midlands	15.861
York/Humber	16.777
NW England	5.856
North (England)	11.326
Wales	10.041

Table 7.35

<b>1992 REGION</b>	<b>INDEX SCORE</b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	10.122
<b>London</b>	17.036
<b>SE England</b>	21.379
<b>SW England</b>	13.601
<b>East Anglia</b>	15.917
<b>E. Midlands</b>	13.503
<b>W. Midlands</b>	10.836
<b>York/Humber</b>	16.356
<b>NW England</b>	10.317
<b>North (England)</b>	7.652
<b>Wales</b>	8.216

*Table 7.36*

<b>1997 REGION</b>	<b>INDEX SCORE</b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	-4.515
<b>London</b>	-1.005
<b>SE England</b>	11.449
<b>SW England</b>	9.084
<b>East Anglia</b>	12.588
<b>E. Midlands</b>	3.953
<b>W. Midlands</b>	2.963
<b>York/Humber</b>	5.898
<b>NW England</b>	1.264
<b>North (England)</b>	0.37
<b>Wales</b>	-5.122

*Table 7.37*



## Appendix D

### Robustness Test of Points System Methodology

Rather than the accurate weighted average regional profiles employed above, an arbitrary points system is used in this robustness test. If the results thus generated differ markedly from those in the main text, then the results in the thesis will be invalidated for being overly sensitive to the methodology. The random/arbitrary regional profile to be used to generate the robustness test points system is:

Arbitrary	n	Wins	Holds	U	U+	Losses	U-
Values	N/A	5	1	0	1	5	1

Table 7.38

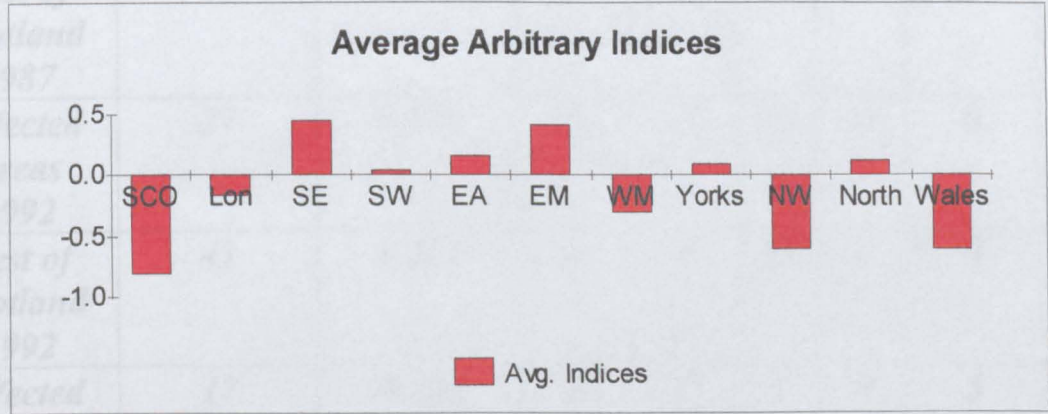


Chart 7.39

When these values are applied to the results of the four General Elections in question<sup>13</sup> and the results averaged to produce Chart 7.39, the following figures confirm that the methodology employed is robust<sup>14</sup> and that the results thereby generated are legitimate.

<sup>13</sup> In the same manner as for the ‘v all years’ section of the main thesis.  
<sup>14</sup> As witnessed by Scotland again being the lowest scoring region and the others appearing in virtually the same ranking as the ‘genuine’ results.



## Appendix E

### Data for Intra-Scottish Comparisons

<b>Region &amp; General Election Year</b>	<i>Number of Westminster Constituencies Involved<sup>15</sup></i>	<i>% Change in Conservative Vote since Last General Election</i>	<i>Wins</i>	<i>Held</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>U+</i>	<i>Losses</i>	<i>U-</i>
<b>Affected Areas 1983</b>	27	-1.23	0	4	15	0	1	7
<b>Rest of Scotland 1983</b>	39	-1.689	2	13	19	1	0	4
<b>Affected Areas 1987</b>	33	-4.219	0	5	11	0	6	11
<b>Rest of Scotland 1987</b>	40	-4.688	0	6	18	0	4	12
<b>Affected Areas 1992</b>	27	0.478	0	7	20	0	0	0
<b>Rest of Scotland 1992</b>	41	1.334	0	4	35	1	0	1
<b>Affected Areas 1997</b>	17	-8.453	0	0	1	0	5	11
<b>Rest of Scotland 1997</b>	55	-8.085	0	0	13	0	6	36

Table 7.40

<sup>15</sup> The numbers of seats in 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997 refer to the number of Scottish constituencies within the boundaries of the regions.

## *Appendix F*

### *Data for Proxy Variable Assessment*

<b>Region</b>	<b>1983 LA Rent %</b>	<b>1983 'v all years' Index</b>	<b>1987 LA Rent %</b>	<b>1987 'v all years' Index</b>	<b>1992 LA Rent %</b>	<b>1992 'v all years' Index</b>	<b>1997 LA Rent %</b>	<b>1997 'v all years' Index</b>
<b>Scotland</b>	53	5.097	48	2.643	35	10.122	30	-4.515
<b>London</b>	-	18.194	28	16.648	22	17.036	20	-1.005
<b>SE England</b>	25	20.867	22	21.475	17	21.379	8	11.449
<b>SW England</b>	19	18.693	17	20.97	13	13.601	10	9.084
<b>East Anglia</b>	23	17.171	20	18.648	14	15.917	13	12.588
<b>East Midland</b>	25	14.484	22	16.869	18	13.503	17	3.953
<b>West Midland</b>	29	12.628	27	15.861	22	10.836	18	2.963
<b>York/ Humber</b>	29	10.386	28	16.777	22	16.356	20	5.898
<b>NW England</b>	27	13.076	25	5.856	21	10.317	17	1.264
<b>North England</b>	36	8.62	33	11.326	27	7.652	26	0.37
<b>Wales</b>	25	10.681	22	10.041	18	8.216	16	-5.122

*Table 7.41*

*Average Regional Local Authority Renting % 1983-1997 = 23.419%*

*Sources of Housing Statistics: Regional Trends*

Number 20, 1985, p61, #24, 1989, p71, #29, 1994, p87 & #34, 1999, p86.

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<sup>15</sup> The numbers of seats in Affected Areas and the Rest of Scotland do not always add up to the number of Scottish constituencies represented at Westminster as it is possible for one seat to lie within the boundaries of more than one Local or Unitary Council.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

### ***Introduction***

This Conclusion summarises my findings, relates them to the hypothesis and defends the case put forward in the thesis. A major potential criticism of the hypothesis is that the reductions in Scottish Conservative Local Government and Westminster representation from 1979-1997 were merely symptoms of the demise of the Party in general north of the border and had no causal relationship. Following a summary of the qualitative chapters, that problem is addressed in a re-presentation of the quantitative evidence of Chapter 7. This Conclusion then finishes with a wider assessment of the work and its contribution to the field.

The thesis investigated the connection and inter-relationship between Local Government and General Election success. The proposition addressed in the hypothesis concerns the electoral fortunes of the Conservative Party in Scotland from 1979-1997 and asks whether:

***Conservative losses in Local Government Elections in Scotland (losses primarily caused by the contemporary 'POMP') were severely damaging to the Party's subsequent General Election chances there?***

The quantitative and qualitative evidence in this thesis suggests that the hypothesis can be supported. The following presents an assessment of my findings.

## ***Thesis Findings***

Chapter 2, which considered the ideology and structure of the Conservative Party, appraised concepts and structures that form part of the traditional canon of explanations for the Party's demise in Scotland. We saw how the hierarchy of the Party sought to maintain its distance from the non-elite and Local Government. This attitude was accepted in affluent regions of England where voters saw their wealth as a result of the expertise of the Conservative leadership. Such a structure was not so effective, however, when the fortunes of local communities were not so prosperous. In such instances (including Scotland), accessibility to the Party Leadership for Conservative Local Councillors would seem to have been an ideal source of information that could have effected more suitable responses in the 'POMP.' As such communication was not possible, we saw how the Party elite in London perpetuated policies that may have been winning them votes in the affluent South East of England, but were causing considerable damage to their 'POS' on the geographical periphery. Not only were such policies as industrial closures and the Poll Tax causing Conservative General Election candidates to lose in Scotland, they were also condemning Party Local Government representatives, by association.

To further the case in favour of the hypothesis, it was necessary to identify which characteristics of Scottish society could have rendered the actions of Local Government so important in the 'POS' there. Therefore, Chapter 3 of this thesis examined the social circumstances and political culture of Scotland; thereby furthering the assessment of why it might have been such a significant problem for the Conservatives to be losing Local Government representation in Scotland? As we saw in the quantitative study later in the thesis, such losses seemed quite easy to recover from in England. In Chapter 3, we discovered that Scottish voters

experienced frequent contact with their Local Councillors as society there seemed to be structured heavily around the state and local communities. There were also more practical reasons such as the very high incidence of Council House renting and attitudes presented in Scottish education and the media. Thus, Scotland's resultant political culture granted significant authority and credibility to Local Government representatives. Therefore, the Conservative Governments in Westminster would have been well advised to take heed of these differences and amend their 'POMP' accordingly. As we have seen, the unitary state ideology of the Thatcher era rendered such flexibility impossible, thus jeopardising the Party's 'POS' north of the border.

Thus, we began to see a potential reason for why the proposition in the hypothesis may be proven. The continued presence of Conservative Councillors in office in Scotland would have allowed the Party closer contact with the communities and the consequent opportunity to effectively organise the 'POS.' However, as these Conservative Councillors lost office, their replacements from Opposition parties had the potential to take advantage of the influential role of Local Government representatives in Scotland to win over the support of their constituents for subsequent General Elections.

Chapter 4 went on to analyse the 'POMP' of the 1980s and 1990s that was causing the Conservatives so much trouble in Scotland. The list of central policies that were to blame was familiar and there was no effort to discredit existing views that they caused the Party problems directly with voters in General Elections in Scotland. However, what should also be remembered throughout the course of these discussions is that they were also causing difficulties for Conservatives at the local level north of the border. Such non-elite Party members, whether

they were Councillors or activists, were essential for the successful organisation of the 'POS' and defence of the 'POMP.' However, due to the succession of unpopular policies emanating from London, these Scottish Conservatives no longer held Local Government office or any credibility within their communities.

In order to further assess how the findings of this thesis could complement the existing canon, Chapter 4 concluded with a review of existing explanations for the Conservative decline in Scotland. The fundamental question that was addressed concerned the nature and chronology of the demise. Some viewed the decline of the Party from its electoral zenith in 1955 as having been long-term and almost inevitable due to the modernisation and secularisation of Scottish society, in addition to economic divergence from England. Alternatively, the New Right policies employed by the Thatcher and Major administrations were blamed for significantly precipitating the Conservatives' downfall north of the border.

The electoral data presented in Chart 4.5 indeed showed a steady decline that did not seem to be altered significantly in the 1980s and 1990s, thus giving credence to the former argument. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, even though they did not seem to lose more votes than expected in Scotland, the Conservatives also failed to increase their share as in other regions of the UK during the Thatcher-Major era. The unpopularity of the policies emanating from London after 1979 must therefore not be discounted. The policies of the New Right were not well received north of the border, as they were incompatible and unpopular with Scottish voters. Many of these voters were dependent on the state for housing, welfare and employment. These benefits were reduced through the 1980s and 1990s through programmes such as 'Rolling

Back the State' and the 'Right to Buy.' With regard to the hypothesis under investigation, the unpopularity of the 'POMP' of the 1980s and 1990s in Scotland becomes especially important once the connection between unpopular central policies and resultant Local Government Election losses is established.

As we saw in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, the removal from office of Conservative Councillors and some aspects of the contemporary 'POMP' allowed Opposition party representatives to gain more influence in their communities in Scotland. Therefore, one set of policies of particular interest here was the 'Rolling Back the State' project. In Chapter 5, we saw how these measures, whilst being popular with affluent taxpayers, somewhat increased the resolve of Opposition party Councillors to discredit the Government in Westminster. Given their extra influence in the local communities of Scotland, these efforts had significant impact on the 'POS' and consequent General Election results.

Chapter 6 offered a more detailed assessment of the effects of the dynamics in question through a case study of the Stirling area. This area was primarily chosen as the Conservatives did not lose the Parliamentary seat until they had lost significant representation on the Local Council. All of the problems that caused the Party to lose seats in Scotland in the General Elections of 1983, 1987 and 1992 were present in Stirling. Therefore, it seemed that the new variable that this thesis proffers; that is to say, that the loss of Local Government representation in Scotland made subsequent General Election campaigns especially difficult for the Conservatives, may have had a significant effect on the General Election in 1997 in Stirling.

## ***Spurious Associations & False Particularisation***

The patterns of Conservative Local Government and Westminster representation in England and Scotland, which were presented in Chart 1.2, suggested that there might have been a causal relationship between the two variables north of the border. Up to the end of Chapter 6, qualitative explanations were presented of why and how the proposition in the hypothesis may be supported. To facilitate a more comprehensive conclusion, Chapter 7 examined UK-wide Local Government and General Election results from 1979-1997 in order to see whether adequate quantitative evidence for the hypothesis was given by the polls in question.

The study was designed to test for empirical evidence for or against the hypothesis and to address the major potential criticism that the findings may be guilty of false particularisation. That is to say, statistical support needed to be sought for a significant degree of causality between Local Government and General Election losses and, furthermore, that this situation was unique to Scotland. If the Conservatives had suffered equal General Election problems subsequent to Local Election losses in all regions of Britain, then it would have been impossible to defend the hypothesis. It would have been too easy to point out that it should follow that a party should do badly in General Elections following Local Government losses in any particular region. Electoral defeats at both levels would seem to be unconnected symptoms of the same problem; that is to say, general unpopularity for the Party that had little to do with whether there were significant numbers of Local Government representatives in office or not.

As Chart 7.1 demonstrated, the Conservatives were not losing greater proportions of Local Government representatives in Scotland compared to the other regions of Britain between



1979-1997. Vitally, however, as the results in Chapter 7 go on to show, the Party found it hardest to recover from these losses in subsequent General Elections north of the border. These results are essential for defending the proposition in hand. The same variable was in place in all regions of the UK; that is to say, significant losses in Conservative Local Government representation preceding General Elections. The psephological study presents substantial evidence that those circumstances consistently led to poor General Election results in Scotland only. Thus, significant statistical support can be given to ascribing causality between Local and General Election losses in Scotland, compared with the rest of the UK.

To defend against the criticism of false particularisation further, it was also necessary to test Conservative General Election performances in areas of Scotland not preceded by Local Government Election losses. If these General Election results were as poor as in the areas north of the border affected by antecedent Local Government Election losses, the hypothesis could still not be adequately supported, as, ultimately, no causal link could be suggested between the two variables of Local Government and General Election losses. The 'intra-Scottish' comparison presented in Chart 7.14 presented further evidence that a substantial causal link did exist between Conservative Local Government and General Election results north of the border. Here, it is shown how Conservative General Election results in the rest of Scotland were significantly better than those in areas affected by Local Government representation losses. In many ways, this stands to reason, as a part of Scotland that was prepared to retain significant numbers of Conservative Councillors only two or three years before was still likely to be somewhat predisposed to the Party at the next General Election. Nevertheless, if the General Election results in these apparently stronger localities had been just as poor as the affected ones, it would seem

that Conservative General Election candidates could have lost in Scotland whether or not their area had strong Local Government representation. This would have rendered any causal links identified in the study as spurious. However, as Chart 7.14 showed, Conservative General Election losses in Scotland were indeed worse where they had recently lost Local Government representatives. I wish to contend that these losses were significant because these Conservative Councillors were very important in Scotland for organising and directing the Party's 'POS' in their areas.

Thus, Chapter 7 showed that the Conservatives did indeed find it harder to organise the 'POS' in parts of Scotland where their Local Government representation was dwindling. Furthermore, this dynamic was more of an acute problem in subsequent General Elections north of the border than anywhere else in the UK.

### ***Conclusion – The 'Politics of Support' and Modern Scotland***

During the 1980s and 1990s, due to the scarcity of Party MPs in Scotland, the primary Conservative interface with the electorate north of the border was, by default, Local Government<sup>1</sup>. We have seen how the actions and reputations of Local Government representatives of all parties assumed great 'POS' importance in Scotland as voters there looked for sources of authority other than the central Government in Westminster. We must now conclude about what sort of effect that the failure of locally organised 'POS' had on the Conservatives' General Election demise.

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<sup>1</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

When questioned about this dynamic, Lord Lang noted that the Conservatives had never really seriously engaged in local politics<sup>2</sup>. This may have been acceptable practice in England where the Party's 'POS' did not seem to be so reliant on Local Government representatives for organisation and direction. In Scotland, however, the consequences were more dangerous. It would be overstatement to claim that Local Government plays a decisive role in General Elections anywhere in Britain. Indeed, as Local Government does not stop for General Elections, Councillors are usually too busy to campaign vigorously<sup>3</sup>. However, this thesis has shown that local politicians in Scotland have considerable influence on their constituents' General Election voting intentions. Therefore, the Conservative elite in London were compounding their General Election problems north of the border by not providing their representatives in Local Government there with adequate support, resources or easily defensible policies.

Once the Party elite in London did decide to pour more resources into local politics, it did so in a half-hearted manner, and somewhat too late. By this time (the late-1980s), local politics was 'out of phase' with the national scene<sup>4</sup>. Hence, Local Government Elections were being used as a protest vote against the national Government in Westminster. In England, it was possible for the Conservatives to recover from losses of Council seats and do well at the next

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01 – repeated in Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002. There are, however, isolated exceptions to this generalisation. For example, several successive officials at the Department of the Environment were 'steeped' in Local Government issues, as they were charged with liaising with the regions – Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01. Michael Heseltine, Lord Belwin (who had begun his career in Local Government in Leeds), John Townend and, especially, John Gummer all made efforts to raise the Party's profile on the local level. It seems, however, that the Conservative Leadership was not so interested.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Martin Perry, 24.8.01.

General Election because it seems that voters there made their General Election decisions based on long-standing party preferences, personal economic fortune and national issues. In Scotland, on the other hand, loyalties were less deep, prosperity was not so high and, crucially for this work, the Party depended much more on local politicians to organise their 'POS.' Unfortunately for the Conservatives, their position in Scotland was heavily damaged by 'POMP' issues that forced Local Councillors out of office. The ensuing lack of organisation at General Elections, it is argued here, eventually reacted back on the central Party's General Election chances. The results in Chapter 7 show a strong causal link between losing local representation in Scotland and poor subsequent General Election campaigns there.

Post-war General Election results suggest that the Scottish Conservatives were declining steadily since the 1950s due to economic divergence with England and the modernisation and secularisation of society north of the border. Therefore, it may seem inappropriate to try to identify the dynamics of Scottish Local Government in the 1980s and 1990s as having had a particularly significant impact on the Party's electoral fortunes there. However, I wish to contend that even smooth regressions of this sort are punctuated and perpetuated by readily definable turning points and events. As Lord Lang said, it was the succession of such events and changes in Scottish society that eventually made it impossible for the Conservatives to be successful there<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the Local Government dynamics of the 1980s and 1990s<sup>6</sup> explored

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Lord Lang, 27.3.01 + Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>5</sup> Interview, 27.3.01 – as examples, he cited the gradual turning of the Scottish media against the Conservatives, the growing incompatibility of Mrs Thatcher's personality and ethos with the apparent 'dependency culture' north of the border and the introduction of the Poll Tax.

<sup>6</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, the nature of Scottish Local Government was very different in the Thatcher-Major era to the 1950s, when it seemed to have little party political influence.

in this thesis could be placed alongside long-term changes in modern Scottish society and unpopular contemporary policies as another important factor in the Party's decline/failure to recover north of the border.

Of course, the correlation identified in Chapter 7 does not unequivocally prove total causation. As Viscount Younger and Lord Lang were most keen to point out, it is impossible to ascribe just one particular variable as being the only cause of the Conservatives' electoral failure in Scotland<sup>7</sup>. I am not prepared to go as far as the former and completely dismiss the concept of cause and effect. I do, though, agree with both insofar as the Party's demise in Scotland was caused by an accumulation of reasons; some of which originated before 1979. There is a set of long and short-term reasons for the Conservative demise, which has been examined in Chapter 4. This thesis acknowledges the importance of these undeniable causes. My main purpose, however, is to introduce and highlight the loss of Conservative Local Government representation caused by inappropriate 'POMP' as a new and worthwhile feature of the canon.

This thesis has shown that many Scottish voters seemed inclined to base their General Election choices on the presence of effective and approachable Local Councillors who represented the national parties there. It seems that the Conservative central elite failed to recognise this. Consequently, not enough was done in London to arrest the tide of Party Local Government election losses in Scotland that were being caused by unpopular measures in the 'POMP.' In conclusion, therefore, I submit that, due to the different social, cultural and party loyalty characteristics of Scotland that were examined in earlier chapters, the Conservative Party

in Scotland did indeed find it very difficult to recover from losses in Local Government representation at subsequent General Elections.

### ***Main Contributions of this Thesis***

In assessing the main contributions of this work, there are four major themes that should be addressed. Firstly, we should consider how the findings of this study add to the understanding of Scottish party politics in the 1980s and 1990s. Most important here are new views regarding the pervasive nature and influential power of Local Councillors over the electorate north of the border. This thesis is not a comparative study and the dynamics of Local Government in England and Wales have not been addressed to any substantial degree. However, that the Conservatives did not suffer the same General Election problems south of the border subsequent to similar Local Government representation losses in Scotland suggests that Local Authorities north of the border played a significantly more influential role in the political culture and ‘POS’ there.

Secondly, this thesis also introduces a new aspect into the well-covered field of why the Conservatives capitulated in Scotland. As recounted in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, there are many well known and legitimate reasons for the Party’s demise, some of which originated before 1979. As I have sought to demonstrate, these changes in Scottish society and unpopular measures in the ‘POMP’ also had subtle ‘side-effects’ in Scottish Local Government and, thus, the ‘POS.’ Many Conservative Local Councillors lost their seats merely through their association with the Party elite in London. Furthermore, Labour and Nationalist groups in Scottish Local Authorities were

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<sup>7</sup> Interviews 14.2.01 & 27.3.01.

encouraged to mount concerted campaigns to discredit the metropolitan Government. Because of these circumstances, it became much more difficult for Scottish Conservatives to defend central policies amongst local communities and organise the effective General Election campaigns. Thus, the Party's 'POS' north of the border was severely compromised. Two further points to reflect on in this Conclusion concern the implications of this work for similar studies of the questions and dynamics in hand.

This thesis emphasises a dynamic in Scottish political culture that seems to have a significant effect on the 'POS.' Therefore, the various political parties might wish to reflect on the proposition that protecting the tenure of their Local Government representatives north of the border should be more of a priority. When a party is in Government in Westminster (or Edinburgh), this can be achieved through regionally sensitive and, thus, easily-defensible 'POMP.' Whether in office or not, parties could also look to provide more resources for Local Government election campaigns and make a commitment to heed the information passed up to the party leadership from non-elite members. Better co-ordinated use of their Local Government representatives in Scotland should also benefit a party in the 'POS.' To these ends, it is interesting to note that Conservatives in Scotland have been campaigning for such acknowledgement from the elite in London for some time<sup>8</sup>. That it was not forthcoming added greatly, I submit, to the Party's General Election problems north of the border. As a post-script, it should also be recognised that the Conservatives' post-1997/2001 re-organisation has begun to re-assert the efficacy of a 'bottom-up' approach to the running of the Party<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Stirling Councillor Survey (Con), Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Keith Harding, 12.9.01.

Finally, this thesis tries to salvage somewhat the processes and characteristics inherent to the 'POS' for political science in Britain. Given the elite focus of the media and studies of 'statecraft' in recent times, it is unsurprising that the issues of Local Government, political culture, community and popular opinion have been overlooked to some degree. In the 1980s and 1990s, issues of globalisation and macroeconomics seemed to dominate. As this thesis and the movement for peripheral Devolution in more recent times show, however, it was somewhat of an error for Governments to pursue the 'POMP' with little respect for their domestic electorate. Such mishandling of the 'POMP' ultimately led to the Conservatives losing the right to govern as their 'POS' had broken down.

The Conservatives' demise from their Scottish electoral zenith in 1955 was a slow steady decline. As the deviant General Election results of 1979 and 1992 show (both of which temporarily reversed the decline), this regression was neither inevitable nor uneventful. In the period from 1979-1997, this decline was marked by occasional changes in the nature of Scottish society and political culture, events, or policies. Such points of interest included the further deterioration of Orangeism/Unionism, economic divergence from England, industrial closures and the Poll Tax. These stood out as particularly damaging to the Party's 'POS' north of the border. I cannot discredit these reasons, but believe that the new dynamics explored in this thesis are worthy of consideration as part of this canon. In conclusion, therefore, I submit that the original contribution of this thesis is to demonstrate that the loss of Local Government representation north of the border in the late Twentieth Century should be added to the existing list of significant causes of the Conservatives' electoral demise in Scotland.



## ***9. The Research Process***

After a precise testable hypothesis has been generated, data collection is always one of the major tests in producing a thesis. The era in question in this work precluded extensive use of one of the two most familiar options for political scientists interested in British affairs; that is to say, archival records. The Public Record Office can only provide certain documents from thirty years ago and beyond. The Conservative Party Archive at the Bodleian Library is subject to similar chronological and confidentiality access restrictions. Nonetheless, essential background information regarding Anglo-Scottish relations and Conservative intra-Party affairs is contained in these latter archives. Thus, they had to be consulted. Going through the proper channels to request permission for access to these documents tests the tenacity and diplomacy of the researcher.

Apart from archival and secondary source analysis, the major remaining research technique, that is to say, interviews, was essential for the completion of this thesis. Gail Stedward asks why interviews form a very frequent part of political science research<sup>1</sup>? She questions whether this is the best method to gather the relevant data? However, she also admits that there is a fairly limited repertoire of alternative techniques available. As documents in the various archives were not going to provide me with sufficient information relevant to the modern era, interviews would be the most reliable option.

The examination of primary sources is always seen as being the more professional way to approach research. This seems to be a reasonable argument, given that the researcher is forced to come up with his, or her, own conclusions without relying on the help of others. However, there are some pitfalls in eschewing secondary accounts, as Rodney Lowe points out<sup>2</sup>. When approaching my interview questions about Conservative metropolitan-peripheral or intra-party affairs, I had to be wary of possible/probable bias in the wording of documents or interview replies. Nonetheless, even if an interviewee's recollections did not seem to be 'correct', such information was useful as a demonstration of what misconceptions the Governments of the day may have been working under; thus generating inappropriate and unpopular 'POMP.' Whyte comes up with some interesting points to look out for when conducting an interview. These are especially relevant if all responses are considered to be subjective views, which have been clouded by the interviewee's own feelings about the matter in hand. The researcher should evaluate the respondent's state of mind and values underlying their opinions. Similarly, ulterior motives behind responses such as career enhancement or the desire to please the researcher should be filtered out. When an interviewee is recounting factual events, distortions must also be dealt with. Such 'mistakes' may occur if the respondent did not actually witness an event, or if memories or perceptions become modified to suit their own needs. Therefore, all such accounts should be corroborated whenever possible<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In: Burnham, Peter (ed.): "Surviving the Research Process in Politics", London, Pinter, 1997, p151.

<sup>2</sup> Lowe, Rodney: *Plumbing New Depths: Contemporary Historians & the PRO*, in: Twentieth Century British History, 8, 2, 1997, pp239-265, pp239-42.

<sup>3</sup> In: Burgess, Robert (ed.): "Field Research: A Sourcebook & Field Manual", London, Allen & Unwin, 1982, pp114-6.

Obtaining access to interviewees is a considerable challenge. Gary Spencer examines the problem that all political science researchers face: that members of the party political elite are often reluctant to grant interviews or survey replies<sup>4</sup>. This hesitancy, he claims, is borne out of a fear of the threats to their careers or reputations that indiscreet comments might pose. This assertion was borne out in my research, as mentioned in several of the chapters. Spencer recommends more informal approaches to lower ranking officials, in-house researchers or third parties if access to the top seems to be impossible. To this, I might add that the advent of Parliamentary, Party and Local Council websites has been useful, as e. mails direct to potential interviewees seemed more successful in by-passing 'gatekeeper' personal assistants than written letters or telephone calls.

Aside from the standard application methods mentioned by Spencer and Stedward<sup>5</sup>, I have found that 'networking' is also very important. Perhaps one of the most important questions in an otherwise slightly unproductive interview can be 'can you suggest anyone else I should speak to about this issue?'<sup>6</sup>. Interviewing academics renowned in the field at the outset of the fieldwork process can be especially useful in this respect.

Preparation is vital before embarking on an interview. Not only will the respondent have no grounds to dismiss the researcher as an amateur, but also authoritative precise questions facilitate an agenda that will both satisfy the needs of the thesis and the ego of the interviewee.

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<sup>4</sup> In: *ibid*, pp23-30.

<sup>5</sup> In: Burnham (ed.), 1997, p153, regarding identifying possible targets through media reports and departmental yearbooks and the writing of an introductory letter etc.

<sup>6</sup> Stedward, in: *ibid*, p155.

As Robert Burgess points out, there is often a need to be silent during an interview to let the respondent expound on a point, thus revealing its true significance<sup>7</sup>. This point was borne out many times in my experience. From primary and secondary accounts that have been consulted beforehand, the researcher should have a definite idea about the course of events under investigation. In my case, these were issues pertaining to the central-Local Government relationship in the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, any deviation from the widely accepted canon of explanations can either reveal how the interviewee or their party was/is out of touch from the social, political and economic realities of the situation under examination or, and with vital importance for this thesis, can generate a new hypothesis.

My hypothesis concerning the connection between loss of Conservative representation in Local Government in Scotland and General Election chances was formulated in exactly this manner. This point, which was not in reply to a direct question, was mentioned first in an informal section at the end of an interview where I always asked whether there are any other matters that should be considered. Thus, we can see that a set of fifty questions that could be answered 'yes' or 'no', whilst having its uses, is a limited methodology that, if I had employed it, would not have facilitated the vital hypothesis-generating comment. Furthermore, as has been mentioned in the thesis' text, the interviewee in question acknowledged that members of the Conservative metropolitan elite were aware of the dynamic in question at the time. However, he admitted that nothing was done in the 'POMP' to arrest the demise of the Party in Scottish Local Government. Therefore, not only did an actual elite interview comment, which

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<sup>7</sup> Burgess (ed.), 1982, p109.

could have been defined as little more than a casual aside at the time, generate an original hypothesis that could be tested, but also gave valuable commentary thereon as well.

Fiona Devine also puts the case for 'open-ended' questions as, as we have seen, they facilitate broader discussions, which may reveal information that the researcher was not aware of<sup>8</sup>. However, the interviewer must be firm occasionally. Time is limited. Thus, whilst diversions may be interesting, their value to the thesis must be evaluated on the spot and put to an end if deemed to be not worthwhile. Prioritising is essential. There are points that have to be covered; some that the researcher would like to be touched on and then some issues that could be discussed if there is time left over at the end. As William Foote Whyte points out, the interviewer must be in control of the direction being taken by the meeting<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, it is up to the interviewer to encourage the respondent to continue, reflect on or repeat a point or to introduce new questions about topics that may or may not have already been touched upon. In Kidder and Judd (eds.), the need for the researcher to control the interview tightly is emphasised in order that the data collected might be of the highest possible quality<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, it is also up to the interviewer to build a strong rapport quickly and thus create an atmosphere in which the respondent will not mind having inadequate or vague responses probed. Furthermore, a pleasant atmosphere will probably allow the interviewer to steer the respondent away from biases caused by the desire to conform to, for example, the wishes of their employer. If a good relationship has been formed, the researcher should also be able to motivate the interviewee more easily, as

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<sup>8</sup> In: Marsh & Stoker (eds.), 1995, p138.

<sup>9</sup> In Burgess (ed.), 1982, p112.

<sup>10</sup> Kidder, Louise & Judd, Charles (eds.): "Research Methods in Social Relations – 5<sup>th</sup> Ed.", New York, CBS Publishing, 1986, pp225-6 & 265-6.

Whyte told us to aim at. Such a relaxed atmosphere can often be built up quickly by asking easy questions at the start of the interview. This assures the respondent that they are not going to be subjected to any kind of inquisition which may make them appear in some way incompetent.

Indeed, I did find that being able to relax the atmosphere of an interview was most productive. All interviewees seemed to be somewhat wary at the outset. As has been mentioned, many were concerned about protecting their careers and reputations. The Stirling case study emphasised this point and introduced some new technique challenges. With one exception in that survey, distance and expense precluded face-to-face interviews. Therefore, the remaining options were written questionnaires or telephone interviews. I have already explained the problems with questionnaires in cases like this. Thus, telephone interviews were mainly employed.

The Stirling Council website provided the Councillors' home telephone numbers. Thereafter, my interview technique was challenged, I submit, more than during the elite (face-to-face) programme. When a long-standing appointment at the House of Lords or Scottish Parliament was used for an interview, the respondents had prior warning and probably took a moment beforehand to collect their thoughts. Indeed, one or two had very definite agendas that they were keen to fulfil in spite, it sometimes appeared, of the questions that I was asking. Before the series of telephone calls to Stirling, each potential respondent was sent a letter explaining the project and my intention to get in touch. Nonetheless, the timing of getting through on the telephone cannot be foretold as accurately as a precise diary date. Furthermore,

it is somewhat of an intrusion to be called at home during the evening. I had to adopt this approach, as the chances of catching a respondent in the Council offices at a moment when they had time to give an interview were slim. The first few moments of the conversations were vital. I had to impart to the interviewees, almost in one breath, that this was a serious project, that their anonymity was secure, that their responses were very important to me and that the interview would not take too long.

Thereafter, the interview schedule had to be precise. I still wanted to avoid a scenario where questions could be answered 'yes' or 'no.' Nevertheless, with a less 'captive' respondent, who could terminate the interview quite sharply, it was necessary to extract as much information as possible in a limited time. Therefore, a little more than during the face-to-face interviews, I had to lead some answers to suit the needs of the case study. For example, I was especially interested to learn about the effects of subsidy cuts, central control of Local Government and the Poll Tax in Stirling. Therefore, if the conversation was dealing with contentious 'POMP', I felt justified in suggesting these policies as examples in order to assess the respondents' reactions. I found this technique useful as it not only suited my agenda, but also negated the possibility of embarrassing silences as respondents tried to think of good examples for the points that they were making. I am very grateful to these respondents who, once they were put at ease, were usually kind enough to grant me a lot longer than I had originally suggested. Once again, these more informal afterthoughts that expanded on my precise schedule were often most productive. The use of face-to-face and telephone interviews presents one of the only major ethical considerations connected with this thesis. The accurate representation of what is said at these meetings is essential.

The methodology employed in the psephological study is described in the text of, and appendices to, that chapter. Of most interest in the research process there was having to design and implement a legitimate points scoring system once I had realised that the immediately obvious statistical methods were inconclusive with regard to the hypothesis. Such an exercise may be open to accusations of ‘fiddling the figures’ until they suited my purposes. This was not the case, however, as demonstrated by my assessment in the chapter itself of the vagaries of the plurality/multi-party voting system in use in General Elections.

Finally, in addition to these methodological issues, finding appropriate conceptual underpinning for a work such as this is an important exercise. Gamble’s ‘POMP’ and ‘POS’ have been very useful in providing a model against which my findings can be measured. This has led to a level of consistency that might not have been present had no particular exemplar or theory of the state been employed. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that concepts such as Gamble’s are of an essentially contested nature. W. B. Gallie presents five criteria that a concept should meet to be considered ‘contested’ and a further two to achieve the status of ‘essentially contested’<sup>11</sup>.

Firstly, a concept should be appraisive in character. That ‘POMP’ and ‘POS’ and their use in this thesis address the nature of the state and party political struggle satisfies this. The concept is internally complex; again given the subject that it concerns and the plethora of theories about it. The subject matter of the concept satisfies Gallie’s requirement to be

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<sup>11</sup> Gallie, W. B.: “Philosophy and the Historical Understanding”, London, Chatto & Windus, 1964, pp157-191.



‘variously describable’ without introducing absurdities and admits to occasional (not necessarily predictable) modification. The wide canon of theories of the state into which Gamble’s concept is introduced does not constitute radical confusion, but does necessitate in-built defensiveness and aggressive assertion. In other words, whilst asserting the validity of the concept, it would be absurd to identify ‘POMP’ and ‘POS’ as incontestable or to proceed without appreciation of other theories’ criteria for assessing the nature of modern democratic states. To be *essentially* contested, a concept must derive from an acknowledged exemplar. Therefore, the underpinning of this thesis conforms to that. Furthermore, the use of the original exemplar should enhance it and preclude its rejection because it has been proved ‘wrong.’ Again, the conceptual work in this thesis meets these criteria as Gamble’s work has been proved useful but neither indisputably ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’ The use of ‘POMP’ and ‘POS’ has brought substantial conceptual underpinning to this thesis; thus facilitating consistency of analysis and escape from reliance on purely positivistic methodologies.

In planning and completing my thesis in political science, the nature and time frame of the subject in hand answered most of the methodological problems for me. Useful state papers would not be available due to the Thirty-Year Rule. Therefore, once a clear hypothesis and conceptual underpinning had been established, interviews would have to play a major role in gathering data to assess the events of an important era.

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**Gamble, Professor Andrew, 16.3.00**, at the University of Sheffield.

*Author of, amongst others, "The Conservative Nation."*

**Harding, Keith, MSP, 12.9.01**, at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh.

*Conservative MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife; Party spokesperson on Local Government; Vice Chairman of Stirling Constituency from 1981 to 1983; Scottish Conservative Policy Commission (Housing); Stirling Council from 1986 to date and Leader of the Council from 1991 to 1995; Conservative Candidate for Falkirk East in the 1992 General Election.*

**Harper, Professor J. Ross, 6.8.01**, in London.

*Chairman of Pollok Conservative Association, President of the Scottish Tory Reform Group, Chairman of the Scottish Society of Conservative Lawyers and President of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association. Professor of Law at Strathclyde University.*

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*Commons Select Committee on Scottish Affairs 1979-1981; Scottish Office 1986-1987; Minister of State, Scottish Office 1987-90, Secretary of State for Scotland 1990-1995; Hon. President Scottish Young Conservatives 1982-1984; Vice-Chairman Scottish Conservative Party 1983-1987.*

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*Lord Advocate 1979-1984; Lord High Chancellor 1987-1997; Government Spokesman on Legal Affairs in Scotland 1983-1984.*

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*Secretary of State, Scottish Office 1982-1987; Chief Executive, Scottish Conservative Central Office 1987-1990; Opposition Spokesman on Scotland 1997-2001.*

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*President of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association 1994-1997; Strathclyde Commission member (Party structure and organisation); Leader of the Scottish Conservative Parliamentary group since 1999.*

**Mitchell, Professor James, 8.6.00**, at the University of Sheffield.

*Author of, amongst others, "Conservatives and the Union – A Study of Conservative Party Attitudes to Scotland."*

**Professor Willie Paterson, 13.9.01**, in Leamington Spa.

*Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the Universities of Aberdeen, Warwick and Edinburgh; Head the Institute for German Studies, University of Birmingham. He has been involved with the Conservative Party in Dundee for many years*

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*Agent for the Conservative Party in the Midlands and West Country. Regional Director for Wales in the early 1990s. He is currently agent for three Conservative MEPs.*

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*Minister of State, Scottish Office 1987-1990; Vice-Chairman, Scottish Peers Association 1996; President of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association 1977-1979; Vice President, National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations 1979-1981; Chairman, National Union Executive Committee 1981-1986; Chairman, Scottish Conservative Party 1990-1993.*

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*Dr Seawright is the author of, amongst others, "An Important Matter of Principle."*

**Senior Conservative Party Official** (who wishes to remain anonymous),  
**21.6.00**, at Central Office.

**Strathclyde, The Lord, 8.11.00**, at the House of Lords.

*Scottish Office (Minister for Agriculture & Fisheries) 1990-1992; Member Shadow Cabinet 1997-; a Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords; Government Spokesman for Scotland 1988-1989; Chairman of the Commission on the Future Structure of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.*

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*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Development, Scottish Office 1970-1974; Secretary of State for Scotland 1979-1986, Defence 1986-1989; member House of Commons Select Committee on Scottish Affairs 1975-1976.*

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Alasdair Beaton (Con)

Margaret Brisley (Lab)

Ann Dickson (Con)

Provost Tommy Brookes (Lab)

Patricia Greenhill (Con)

John Hendry (Lab)

Keith Harding (Con)

John Paterson (Lab)

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